By Chen Yu
Translated by Li Guishan

FASCINATING MURAL STORIES FROM DUNHUANG GROTTOES

Vol. 2

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The Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes were inscribed on the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1987. Cultural relics found in the Dunhuang Grottoes, including beautiful murals, colorful statues, detailed silk paintings and illustrations of magnificent architecture demonstrate the originality, artistry, and wisdom of the ancient Chinese artists who created them. Examination of these valuable pieces of work can provide us with a better understanding of ancient Chinese politics, economy, culture and religion, as well as of the relationships that existed between various ethnic groups and between peoples in the East and the West in ancient China.

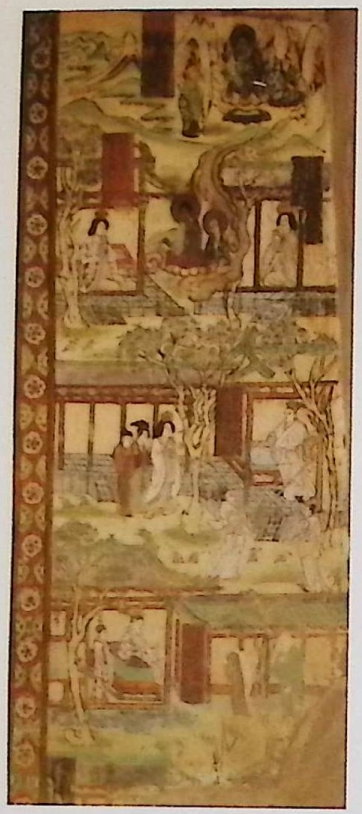
The translations presented in this book comprise mainly Buddhist history, legends and stories. The 137 vivid, beautiful mural pictures were provided by Dunhuang Cultural Centre. This English version, *Fascinating Mural Stories from Dunhuang Grottoes*, is an exquisite picture album containing colorful images that promise to be a feast for the reader's eyes. We dedicate this book to all those who have traveled from far and wide to see the Dunhuang Grottoes.

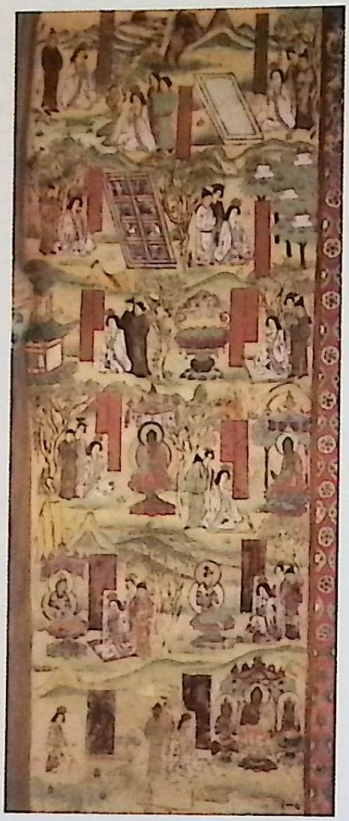
Building Khotan Kingdom

A Beggar Turned into a Rich Man

Water-moon Avalokitesvara

Ananda Begged for Milk





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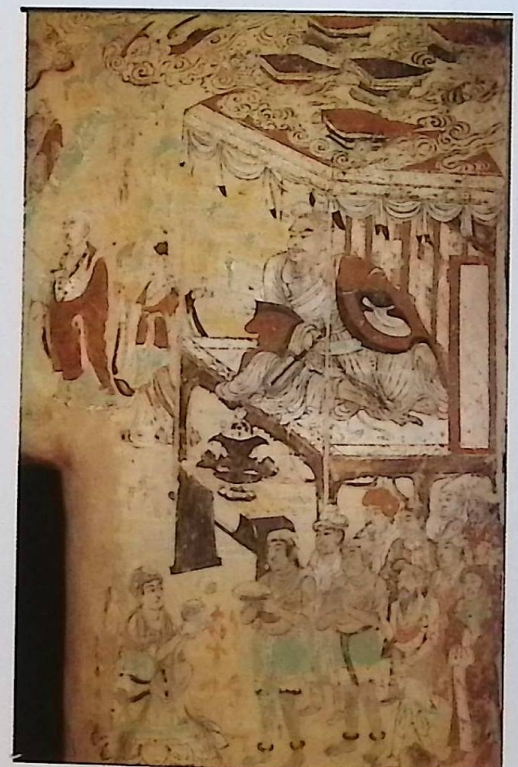

Bodhisattva Manjusri Visited Sick Vimalakirti

Two Sons Persuaded Their Father to Believe in Buddhism

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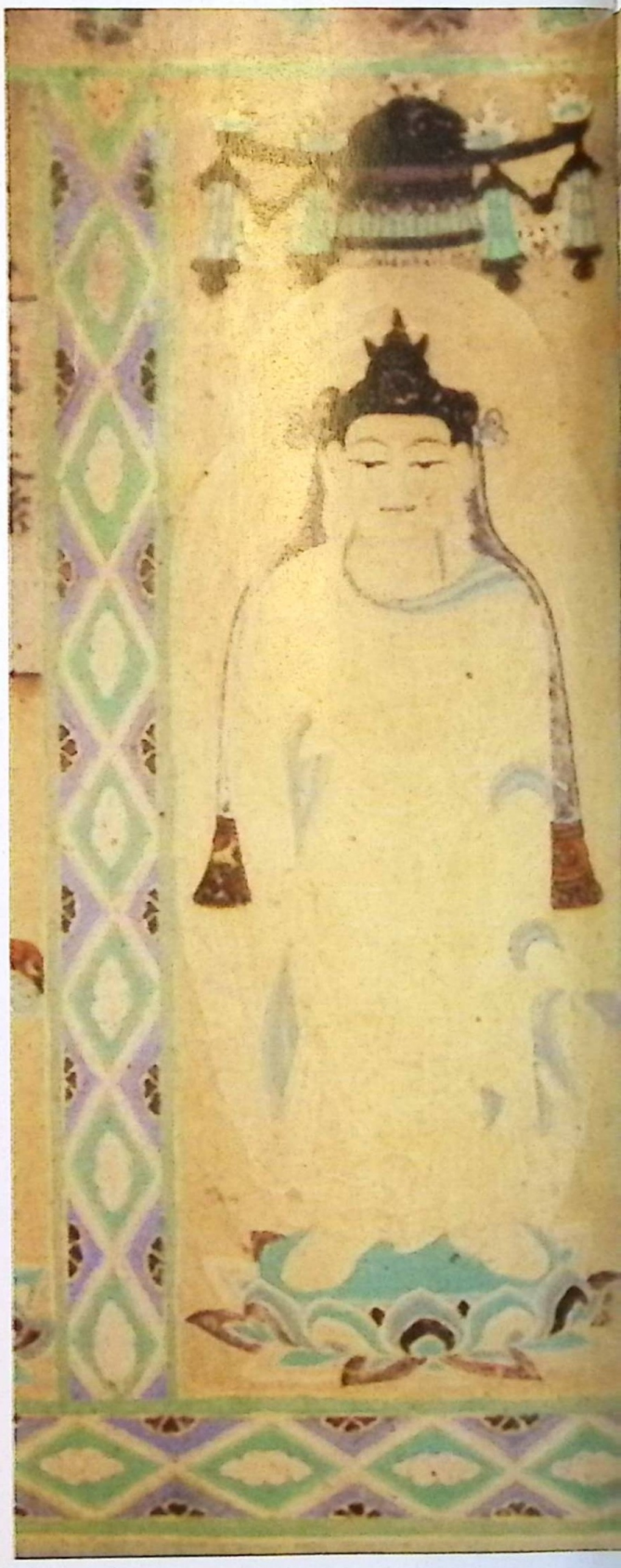
Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and Putuo Mountain



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Glowing Pagoda

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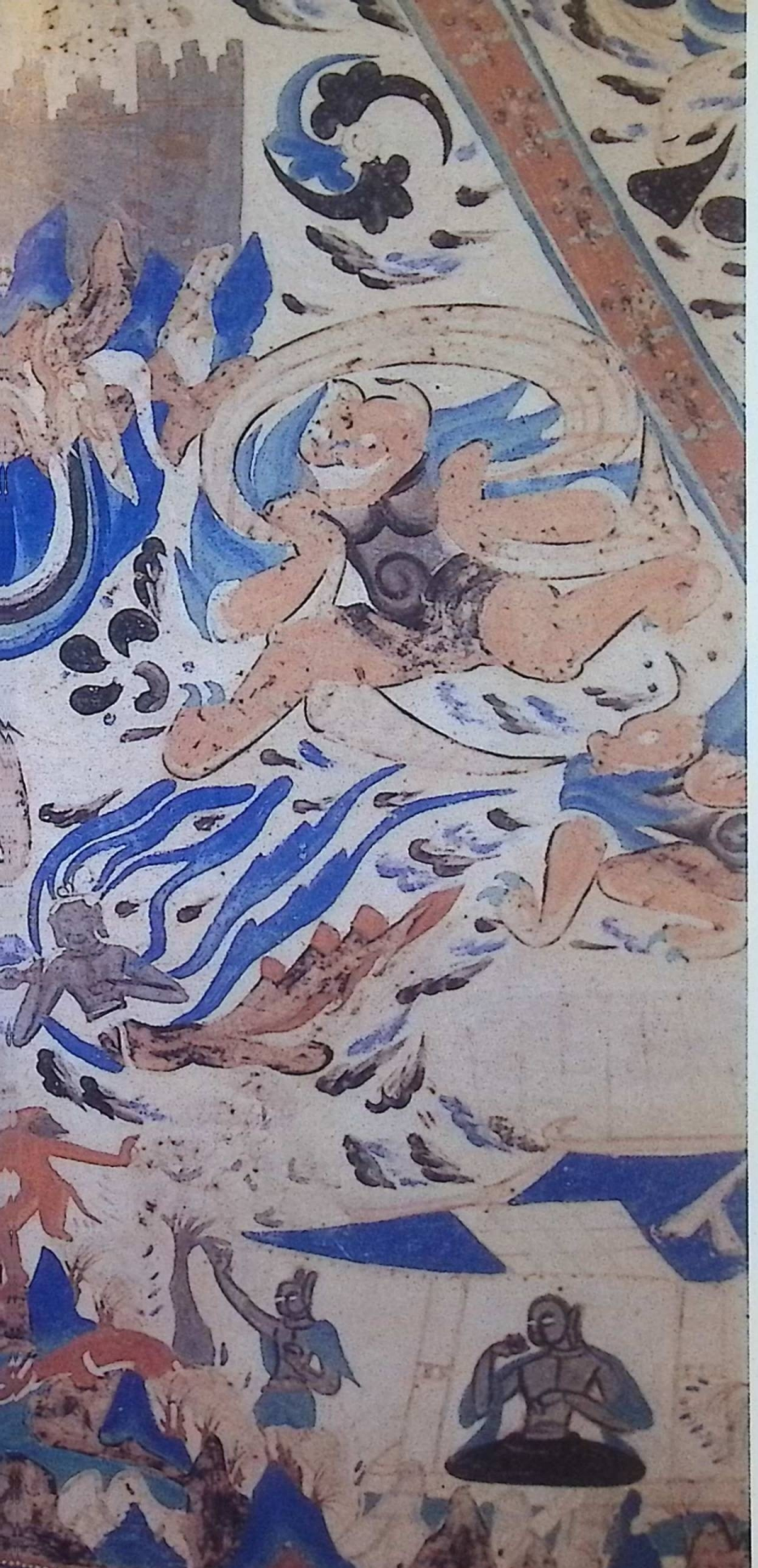
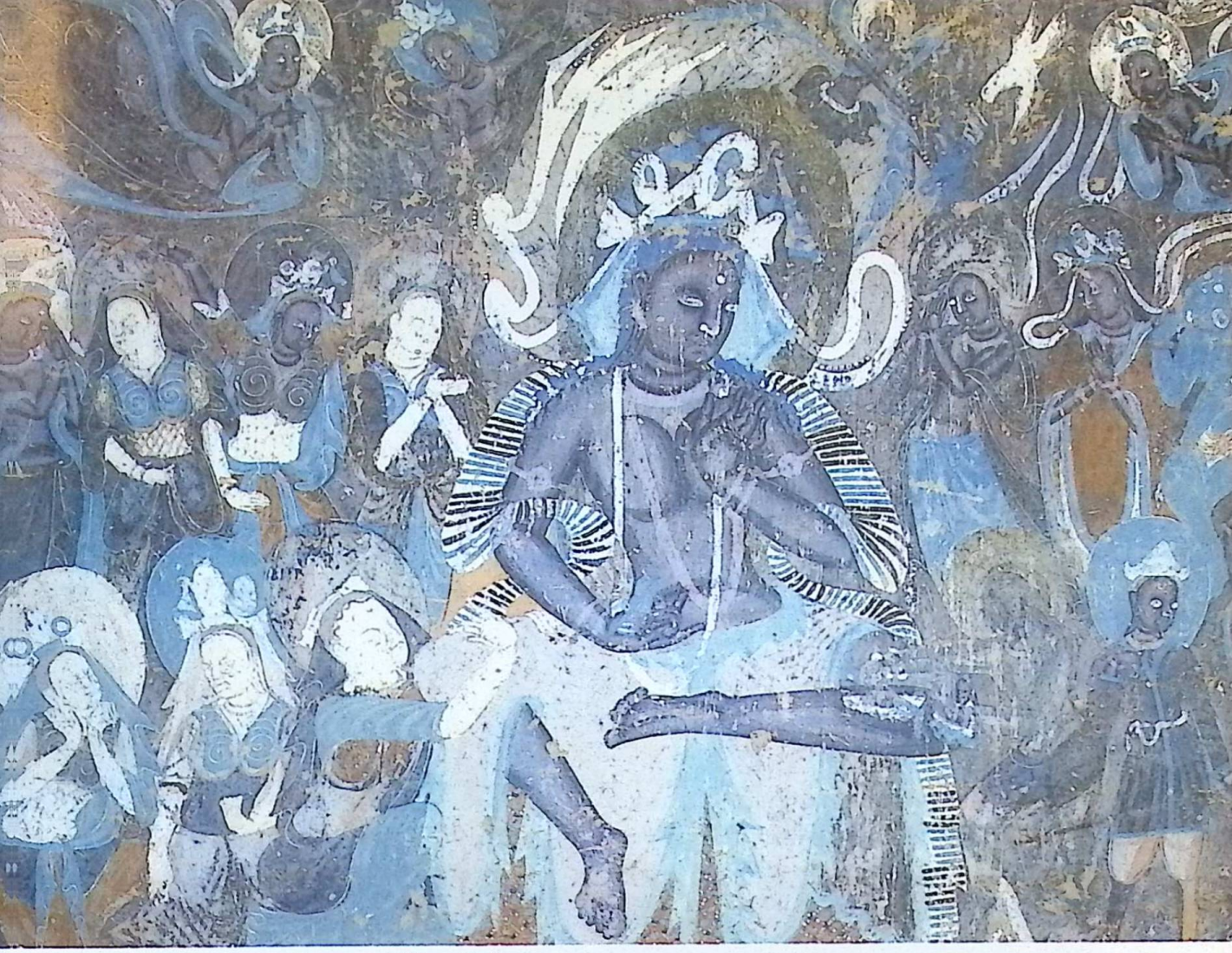


The Colossus, Asural Holding the Sun and the Moon

Deer King Saved Posterities



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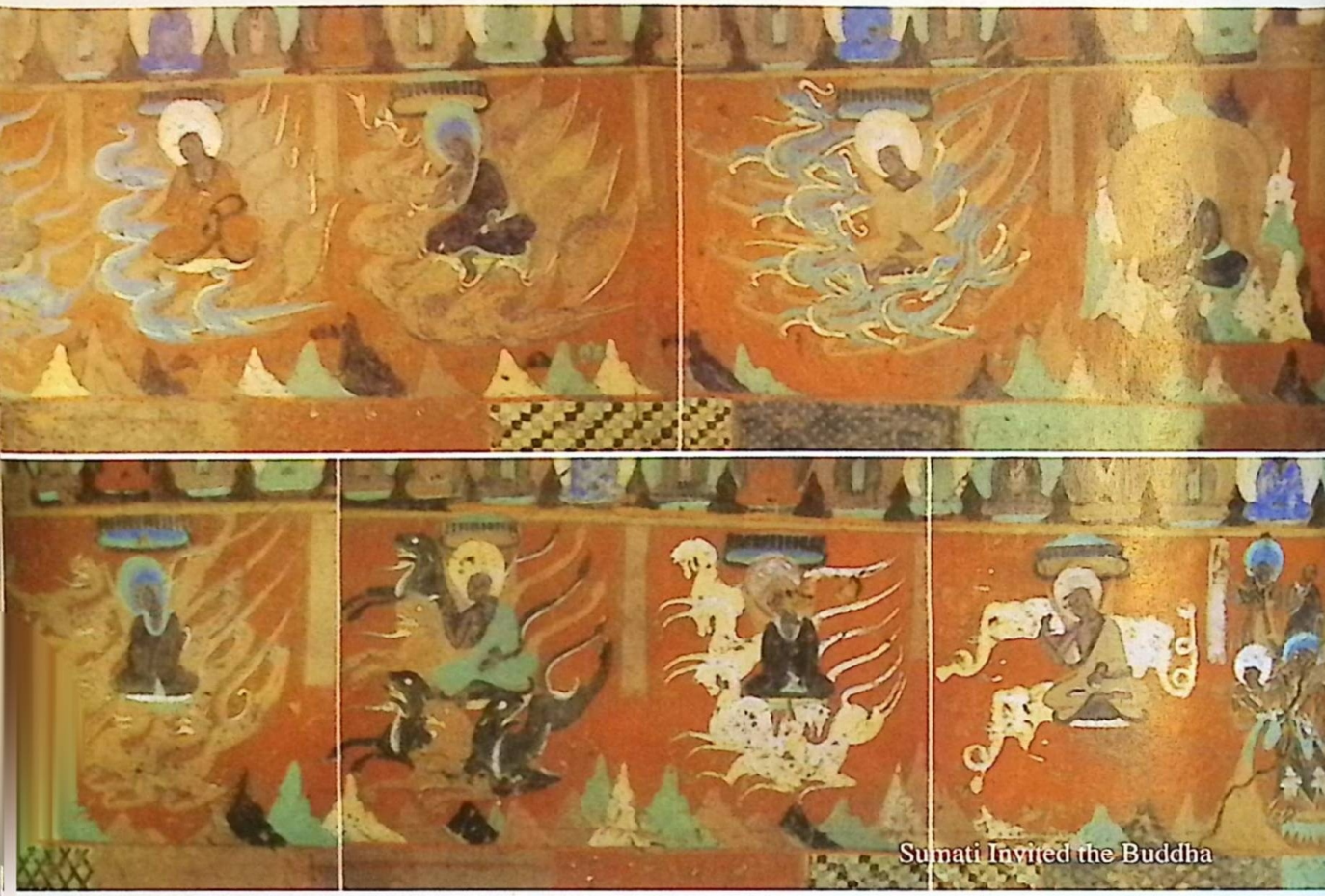

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Vicious Dog and Its Predestined Relation with Buddhism

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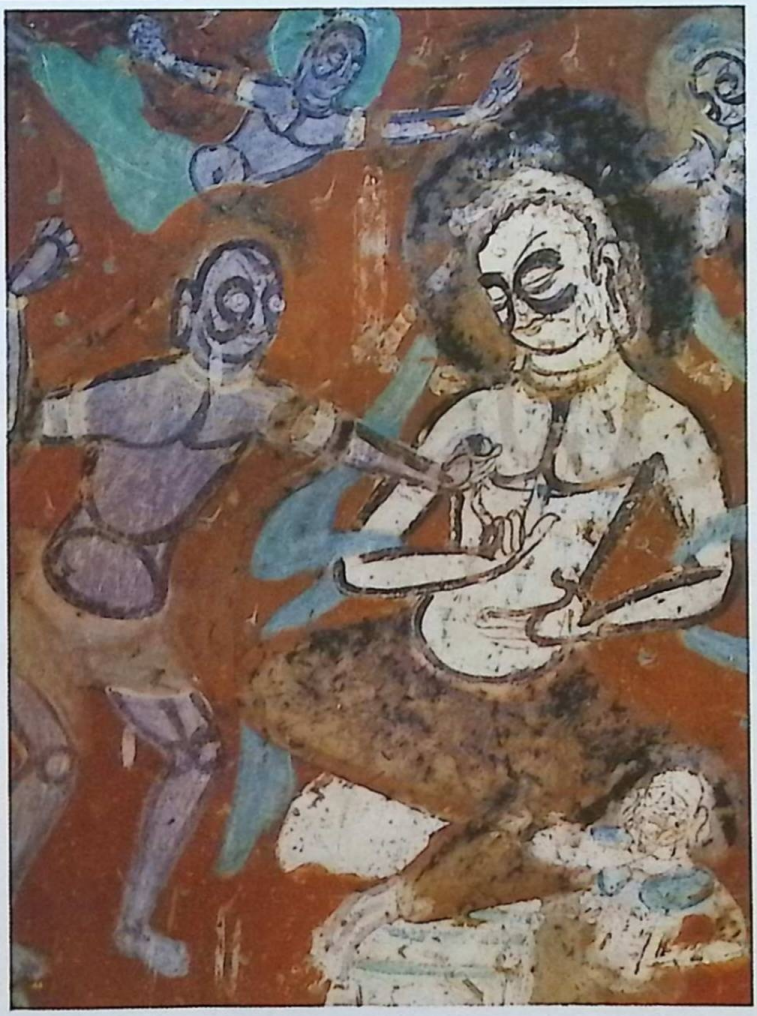
The Derivation of Amitabha



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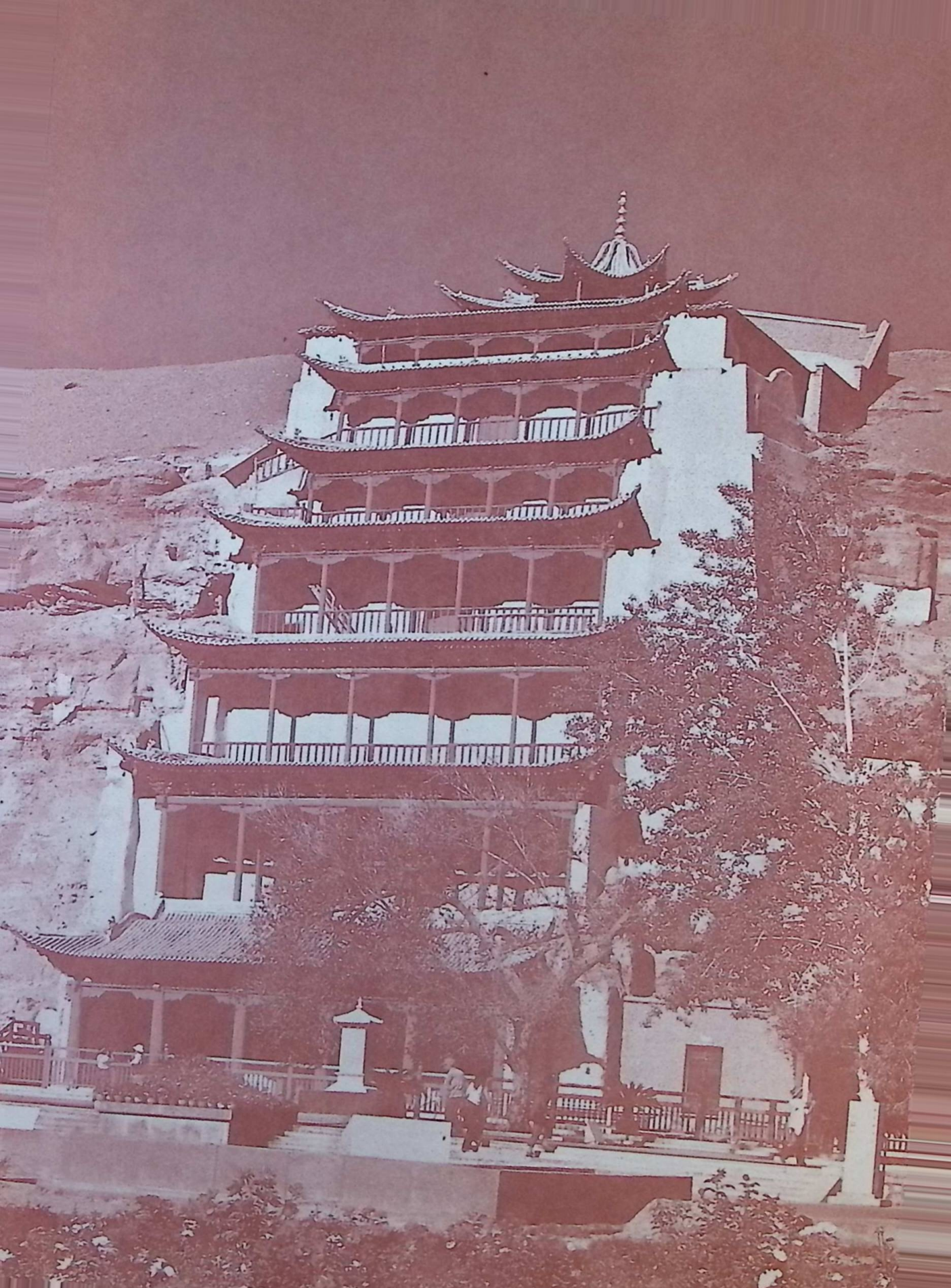

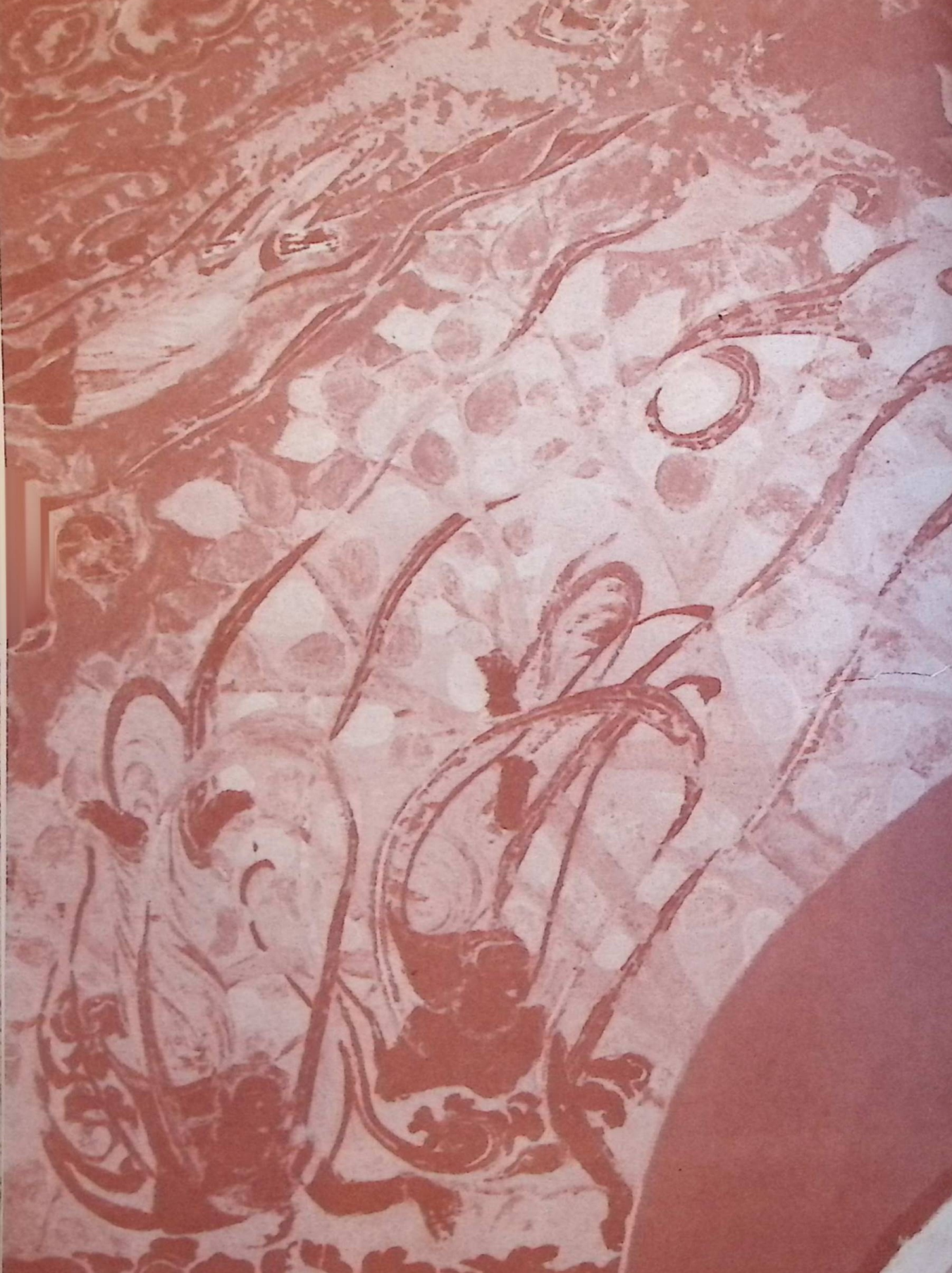

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63

Building Khotan Kingdom

South Wall, Cave 154, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 618-907

Within Khotan (Hetian) in the Xinjiang region was the Khotan Kingdom which was also called Kustana Kingdom in ancient times. The Silk Road to Khotan ran through the south of Yangguan Pass. Therefore, the Khotan Kingdom had a very consanguineous cultural and economic relationship with Dunhuang. In Cave 98 of the Mogao Grottoes is a large portrait of King Khotan, his wife, and his family, and the painting on the southern wall of Cave 154 of mid-Tang Dynasty represents the fairytale of how the kingdom was built.

Once upon a time, Asoka of Sindhu in ancient India was an outrageous and ambitious king before he believed in the power of Buddha. He often guided his military to invade other kingdoms and rob their fortunes. One day, Asoka led his massive military and his favorite imperial concubine north. He had two goals in mind: expand his northern territory and enjoy the mountains and rivers. When they climbed over the snowy mountains and arrived in Khotan Kingdom, they found a mild climate, prosperous grass and water, and a small population there. They also found some families living by the seaside, all of whom were originally the offsprings of King Asoka's residents. Their ancestors were against the king so they were driven out of the kingdom and had to climb over the snowy mountains and start living here. There were all kinds of people including ministers, generals, Brahman, physiognomists and common people.

At that time, the imperial concubine, who had been pregnant for nine months, delivered a little prince. Although King Asoka had his wife and concubines, he had never had a son yet. Therefore, he was quite happy and invited a local physiognomist to anticipate the future of the little prince in half a month. The physiognomist's dead father had been also banished from there due to offending King Asoka so the physiognomist hated Asoka and wanted

Asoka to die without sons. He knew Asoka had a bad temper so he had to watch what he said or else he could be sentenced to death by the king. Therefore, the physiognomist looked at the prince cautiously for quite some time and finally said with his head shaking, "The little prince appears to be a king and a promising prince when he grows up. But..."

"But what? Say it quickly!"

"If the little prince grows up, his feat will be better than yours and he will manage the kingdom more strongly, kill people more venomously, expand more territory, have more power and lordliness..."

"Silence!" King Asoka asked angrily, "Will he usurp my kingship?"

"It's hard to say. It surely happened in ancient times that the sons killed their fathers in order to usurp the scepter."

The overbearing Asoka believed in the physiognomist's words without any doubt. He was jealous of the little prince and hated the prospect that he would seize the scepter in the future. He ordered the little prince to be banished

from the kingdom. Although the little prince's mother pleaded and burst into tears, King Asoka refused to console her and forced her to go back to his kingdom.

The little prince who was thrown into the grassland cried due to hunger but there was no one around and nobody could hear him. Even if someone could, he or she wouldn't care about him because they hated Asoka deeply. The next morning the land in front of the little prince hunched suddenly and its shape was like a woman's breast, bursting with fragrant and sweet milk which trickled into the little prince's mouth so that he could stay alive. People called him Land Latex.

At that time, there was a Handi Kingdom in the eastern land. The king had 999 sons and needed one more to make 1,000. The guardian king, Vaishravana, who was in charge of the north, found Land Latex. By this time the boy was five or six years old and nobody had taught him martial arts so he offered Land Latex to the Handi Kingdom and asked the king to adopt him as a son. The king saw Land Latex and was pleased so he was very happy to adopt him and fianally accomplished his wish to feed a thousand sons.

Land Latex studied and practiced martial arts together with the other princes. The king doted on him very much and regarded him as his own son and this made the other sons very jealous.

One spring festival, the whole Handi Kingdom celebrated the holiday together and the subjects were all very happy. While all the princes were playing a game, Land Latex accidentally offended another prince.

"You are a wild kid without a mother! How dare you beat me?" the prince screamed.

The other princes joined in to harass Land Latex, shouting, "You were not delivered by our queen mother but were picked up somewhere!"

"You are a fake prince!"

"You are not a subject of the Handi kingdom!"

"You are from another kingdom!"

Land Latex who had never been abused before was dumbfounded and burst into tears. He ran back to the palace and asked the king, "Father King, did you pick me up somewhere?"

"No."

"Am I from the Handi Kingdom?"

"Who told you that you were not?"

"My brothers said I was not your son. They said I was a wild kid, a fake prince from another kingdom!"

"Don't listen to their nonsense."

"Father King, my brothers must have evidence to say so. Please tell me the truth!"

The king was perplexed whether to tell him or not.

"If Father King doesn't tell me the truth, I'll fast!"

Land Latex ate nothing from then on and starved himself. Seeing his favorite son not eating, the king couldn't help but tell Land Latex the truth.

"Father King, although you are my foster father, you regard me as your own son so I thank you for your adoption. I am determined to leave you and go back to where I was born."

"Why? Why do you want to leave me? I can't let you go!"

"You have so many princes who will contend for power and profit with each other. I don't want to join them so I want to go back to where I was born in Khotan to build my kingdom. Please give me permission."

The king thought it over carefully. Land Latex's words were quite reasonable so the king satisfied his request.

Prince Land Latex left the Handi Kingdom with ideal men, generals, military, servants, carriages, and properties equipped by his father and he headed west until he arrived in Khotan.

It had been more than a decade since Land Latex left Khotan. During those years, outrageous Asoka continued to banish many guilty subjects from Khotan. The banished people settled in barren land, sowed its soil, built the kingdom of Kustana and elected their king. They certainly couldn't allow Land Latex to invade their territory so the two sides stood facing each other ready to fight. When a fierce fight was about to start, the northern Vaishravana guardian king and Lakshmi came to the battle and persuaded them not to use their weapons by describing Land Latex's life experiences and the enemy king's encounter in detail. The two sides put their feuding aside and united as a kingdom. They appreciated Vaishravana and Lakshmi for their intervention and enshrined

them from generation to generation.

Because Land Latex had a powerful army, he was elected the king of Kustana. Land Latex planned to build his capital but he was uncertain about a good location. He sent out an announcement and invited people who were familiar with the geography to make suggestions. At that time, Misery Taoist heard the announcement and went to see the king saying that he knew the best place to build the capital.

Land Latex ordered him to select a place. Misery Taoist took a huge cucurbit on his back full of water. He came to a piece of flat grassland and said, "This is a land with dramatic beauty. If the capital is built here, the kingdom would be strong and peaceful. I shall pour water to make an outline where the city wall will be built." After pouring the water, he ran far away and disappeared.

King Land Latex thought that a supernatural being was giving directions so he ordered the city wall to be built based on the watermark left by the Taoist. Then the palace, temple, streets, mansion and residential areas were built within the city walls. Afterwards, the kings of every dynasty set their own capital there. The city walls were not tall, but since ancient time, the kingdom has never been invaded by enemies.

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The Treasure-granting Statue

Cave 154, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Long ago, the emperor of Sinhala worshiped Buddha and built an exquisite palace several hundred meters tall that housed a tooth of the Buddha. The grand and gorgeous palace's walls were adorned in gold and decorated with carnelian, pearl, and crystal. A large post stood at the top of the palace that was covered with various types of prism stones and had a great Moraga set on top. The iridescent stones and exquisite palace formed an extraordinary sight day and night that was comparable to the brilliance of the stars in the sky.

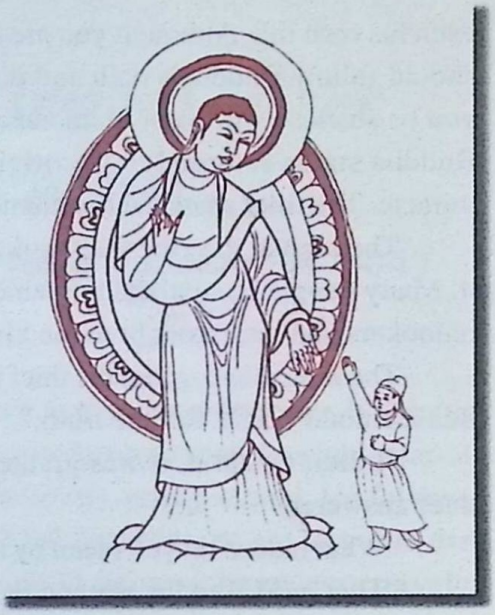
The emperor showed such great respect to the Buddha tooth housed in his exquisite palace that he washed it with perfume three times, praised it with sandalwood three times and wrapped it in spice for worship every day.

There was another small palace made of glittering jade and decorated with jewels and gold. In the small palace, there was a gold Buddha statue molded according to the size of the previous emperor of the nation. The bun of the statue was set with precious jewels. In the middle, there was a valuable diamond that shined all day and night. The emperor ordered that a lock be placed on the doors and windows for protection and also dispatched soldiers to patrol the grounds continuously.

In the city there was an expert thief who was able to steal anything. He lost interest in small jobs and pined for the diamond on the head of the gold Buddha.

The thief thought to himself, "If I could get the diamond, I would become a very rich man. With my wealth, I could buy the territory of half the country. I would become the emperor and welcome people to worship at my

feet!"



In order to realize his dream, the thief often staked out the small palace and thought considerably several ways to steal the golden Buddha. However, given its rigorous protection, his dream would be difficult to bring to fruition.

One afternoon, the thief returned home from the palace but was still without any good ideas on how to pull off his heist. Anxious, he sighed to himself in his rundown house, "Ah, when can I get the diamond?"

At that time, several mice were scurrying into the house. Annoyed by the mice, the thief threw something at them. The frightened mice ran into the hole in the corner. The thief was inspired by this and thought, "If I dug a hole under the palace like the mice, I could get the diamond!"

The thief began to implement his plan by renting a house close to the exquisite palace and immediately he began to measure its size and distance from the palace to begin his digging. The thief slept during the day and dug his tunnel at night. Several months later, a hole leading to the palace was finished. The thief came into the palace through the tunnel at night. The multicolored jewels made him dizzy. He went directly to the gold statue of the previous emperor and anxiously stretched out his hands to pick the shining diamond at the bun. However, the gold statue began to grow and the thief could hardly reach it. He stood on a stool, then on a table, but he was still unable to reach the diamond. At last he climbed up on the gold statue but he still failed to get the diamond.

The thief had to give up. He sat on the ground and thought, "Months of my hard work has proved useless." He then said to the statue in a sardonic tone, "The Buddha took an oath swearing he would sacrifice himself to people who are in need. Everything includes all his personal belongings, daughter, son and

even his own life. Although you are a statue, you are the statue of Buddha. You should follow Buddha's oath and donate everything to the public. How could you be so close with your diamond and breach your oath?" Suddenly, the gold Buddha statue returned to his original size and even lowered his head by a miracle. The thief snatched the diamond easily and went home in great delight.

The second day, the thief took the diamond to the market and tried to sell it. Many people recognized the famous diamond, thus the thief was caught by onlookers and was brought to the king.

The king interrogated the thief himself immediately. "Where did you steal this diamond from? Tell the truth."

"I didn't steal it, it was granted to me by that gold Buddha statue," the thief answered.

"What indeed do you mean by saying that?" the king doubtfully answered.

"That gold Buddha statue felt pity on me and lowered his head to offer this diamond. Please send the guards to the small palace to check whether the gold Buddha statue is still lowering his head or not," the thief insisted.

The king went to the palace himself and saw the scene exactly as it was described by the thief. The king worshiped the status and released the thief. Moreover, the king gave the thief money to take the diamond and return it to the statue. Interestingly, the statue has never raised his head again since then.

Translated by Fan Juan

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A Beggar Turned into a Rich Man

South Wall, Cave 156 Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

In March of early spring red flowers and green grass were blooming, orioles were singing, and swallows were darting about. An eight-year-old child was playing happily during the lovely spring season. He followed butterflies and wandered throughout the land. However, he got lost after dark and couldn't find his way home. The child became homeless, traveled everywhere, and became a beggar.

The child was the only son of a rich man in ancient India. The man had been at low spirits since he lost his only son that spring and was listless while looking at his piles of treasure. He wondered who would inherit his possessions after he passed away.

More than ten years had passed and the little beggar became an adult. One day, the beggar unintentionally went back to the city where he had lived when he was a child and begged for food at the rich man's house. The rich man looked at the beggar carefully and thought he looked familiar. The beggar's looks were very similar to his lost son's and he was also around the same age as the man's son. The rich man was exultant. He asked the beggar to come into his house and ordered his servants to bring him food.

The rich man decided to make some cautious inquires about the beggar's real identity. He asked the beggar while he was eating, "Young man, where is your home and why do you make a living by begging?"

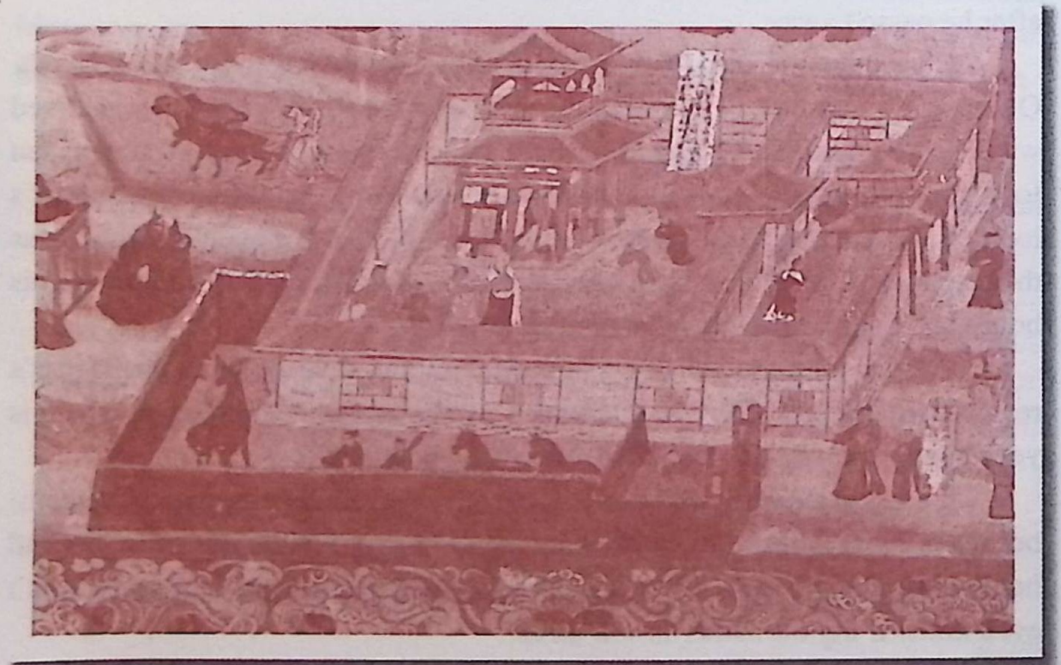
"I can't remember where my home is," answered the beggar. "I remember when I was a child my house had a very big yard with silos of grains and herds of sheep and cows. I lost myself one spring and became a beggar. I don't even know if my old father is still alive."

The story described by the beggar was exactly the same as his son's! The rich man was convinced that the beggar was his own son! He asked the beggar to have some more delicious food. The beggar usually ate what others had thrown away, and hadn't tasted delicious food for a long time. The beggar drank and ate as much as he could. In fact, he drank a bit too much and got drunk at the table. The beggar woke several hours later and compared the rich man's silk clothes with his own tattered ones. He looked around and saw a beautiful yard and cloister, and thought it was a magnificent house. His mind raced quickly, "I begged for many years and all the rich men I met were merciless. What kind of lusions does this rich man have in his mind? This is not the right place for a beggar like me and I should leave immediately."

The beggar ran off.

When the rich man woke he intended to explain the truth to the beggar, but the beggar could not be found. The rich man immediately asked his servants to take off and catch up with the beggar.

The beggar saw someone running after him and doubted even more the rich man's intentions and thus continued to run desperately. Unfortunately, he



didn't eat well all the time and was weak. The beggar was finally seized by the servants and brought to the rich man. The beggar believed that it would be impossible for him to escape death since he had offended the rich man. He was so scared that he fainted. His father asked his servants to wake him up by pouring cold water on his face and said to him smiling,"Young boy, don't be afraid of me. I feel compassion for you and nothing more. How about you work for me and I will cover your living expenses?"

The beggar experienced many cases of poor people being cruelly killed by rich men and didn't believe the man at all. The only thought in the beggar's mind was to escape from the house. He pleaded, "Thank you for your food. I don't know how to work, so please let me go as a beggar."

The rich man heard the words and understood that his son was wary of him. He decided not to force his son to stay and let him go.

The rich man was very sad seeing his son leave him again and thought of an idea. He sent one of his servants to pretend to be a beggar and beg together with his son. When the servant became familiar with the beggar, he tried to persuade the son to return.

"I am going to become a servant in a rich man's house." the disguised servant said. "The master needs another person to work for him and do some cleaning. You will be paid a small amount of money daily and your food and living place will be covered as well."

On hearing this, the beggar followed the servant to the rich man's house. He cleaned the toilet and dealt with other sundries every day and the boy was able to stop begging.

The beggar got along with the rich man for a while and found he was a good-tempered old man who never maltreated his long-term workers. The beggar's doubts faded and he worked even harder. The father saw everything and was distressed that his son worked so much. He kept searching for an opportunity to tell him the truth.

One day the rich man saw his own son covered in sweat and wearing filthy clothes. A sense of fatherly love rose from his heart. The rich man took off his silk clothes and put on coarse clothing. He came to where his son was working and told him, "I am a lonely old man and you are a homeless and

honest young man. If you don't mind, please take your place in my home and treat me as your own father."

The rich man's words excited his son very much. He was so happy to have a kind old man like him to be his father. They became father and son. The rich man taught the beggar how to read and write and took him everywhere he went—to the market and to all the peasant households to collect rent. He taught him how to manage the family property and finances. The beggar understood everything he learned. The rich man felt reassured by his well-behaved son.

The beggar became the master of his father's entire property and dealt with everything himself while taking care of the rich man with the utmost sincerity. When his father was on his deathbed, the beggar took great care of him dispensing medicine and preparing various herbs to treat his father's illness.

The condition of the father's illness became worse and worse. The rich man knew he was going to leave the world soon and called in all his relatives and friends and said to them,"You all know that I lost my only son more than ten years ago but God has been so kind as to bring him back. The beggar I had taken in was my own son and I now announce to all that I am leaving all my personal possessions to him. You are here today to be my witnesses."

Everybody was happy for the father and son and congratulated them on their reunion. Several days later, the father passed away and the beggar became a famous rich man in the town.

Translated by Fan Juan

66

Ananda Begged for Milk

East Wall, Cave 159, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Once upon a time, Buddha Sakyamuni went to the musical garden of Vaisali and preached the Three Treasures, the Buddha, the Law and the Order to the 1,800 monks. During his preaching, he became sick and felt a little uncomfortable. It was said that a bowl of fresh milk could cure this kind of illness, so Buddha Sakyamuni asked one of his disciples, Ananda, to beg for milk. He told him that he could only go to the Māyini's home, which was close to the garden. Following the order, Ananda went to the Māyini's home directly with an alms bowl in his hand.

Māyini was well known because he was the guru of Brahman and he had thousands of disciples. Everyone, from the king to the common people of the country, respected him. He was also very rich and no one had more treasures than him. He was pretty stingy and thought life centered around money and didn't believe in Buddhism, so he never gave alms to the temple. He even covered his yard with a huge net in order to prevent birds from eating his grains. He also told his servants to guard his gate from monks or beggars who were forbidden from entering his home. However, he cared about his reputation very much and he pretended to be generous in front of his friends.

When Ananda came to the main gate of the Māyini's, he saw that the servants closed the gate tightly and refused to let him in so he had to wait.

The secular devotee, Vimalakirti, saw him on his way to the musical garden to listen to the preaching of Buddha Sakyamuni. He stopped and asked Ananda, "What are you doing here in the early morning?"

"Buddha Sakyamuni got a cold and felt uneasy so I came here to ask for fresh milk to cure his illness," Ananda answered.

On hearing that, Vimalakirti pulled Ananda into a corner and whispered to him, "You'd better lower your voice or else the Brahmans will hear you!"

"Why shouldn't they hear me?"

"You are the disciple of the Buddha. Don't you know how to protect him?" Vimalakirti responded, "Buddha Sakyamuni cultivated himself according to the doctrine of Buddhism and cut off all his evil roots, accumulated countless wisdom, and made himself into a vajra. Therefore, how can he get sick? Even if he was truly ill, the disciples should never tell other people because if the news was spread, many people who dodn't believe in him will find evidence to attack him. Other Buddhists would become doubtful. If the Buddha himself was sick, how could he help clear up the illness and suffering of other people? Ananda, don't mention this again. Don't profane the Buddha with such a little thing. Go back to your place!"

Ananda turned back and walked for a while when he thought, "I can't go back if I don't get the milk even though Vimalakirti's words were reasonable. Besides, while Buddha Sakyamuni asked me to go to the Māyini's, he must have his reasons. If I go back now, I will turn down his will." He went back to the gate of the Māyini's again and waited for him patiently.

Later on, Māyini walked out with his 500 disciples to go to the palace to see the king. They saw Ananda standing there beside the gate and knew he came to beg alms, but Māyini pretended not to see him and walked away. Ananda

went up, stopped him and said, "I came to your honorable house to beg for some alms, please help me with your kindly deeds."

Māyini stopped unwillingly and asked Ananda sarcastically, "You must be the disciple of Buddha Sakyamuni. What do you want?"

"I just ask for some milk to drink," Ananda answered.

Māyini thought to himself, "One bucket of milk is worth a lot of money. Even if I never drink it, how can I send it to the monk?"

At that time, a lot of people gathered around the gate. They all wanted to see how greedy Māyini would deal with this little monk.

"How can I send him off?" Māyini said to himself. "If I refuse to give the milk to the monk, people will laugh at me for my rudeness. If I give it to him, Brahman would think that I collaborate with the monks. What should I do? Ok, why don't I send him to milk the ferocious cow? The cow only recognizes the herdsman who raised her. If a stranger goes near her, she usually kills them with her horns. Let me send Ananda to milk the cow and get killed. I will let the people see that a monk cannot milk the cow so they will laugh at him and think that I'm quite generous at the same time. People will not know that it's me who killed the monk. Kill two birds with one stone!" Having made his decision, he smiled and said to the monk, "Ananda, all the cows have gone out to eat grass except one which just gave birth to a calf. It's in the cow shed and you can go there to milk as much as you want. I will ask the herdsman to lead you there."

The people who listened to their conversation were very surprised and whispered to each other, "Did the sun rise from the west today? Why is Māyini so generous today?"

Māyini then decided not to go to the palace but to watch how the monk would deal with the cow instead. He went back to his room and warned the herdsman, "You take the monk to the cow shed, close the door, and leave him and let the monk milk the cow by himself!"

"Master, the cow is very fierce. If the monk goes there, it will kill him..."

"Shut up! It's none of your business. Just follow my order! Otherwise it's you, not the monk, who will get killed!"

The 500 disciples knew their teacher was not generous, but to kill a monk was very cruel. The herdsman went with Ananda to the shed.

Followed by many villagers, Māyini went to the cow shed with his 500 disciples to see the result of his evil idea with his own eyes.

Arriving at the cow shed, Ananda took out his alms bowl and gave it to the herdsman, "Please help me milk the cow!"

The herdsman lowered his voice and said, "Your honored monk, if I help you to milk the cow, I will lose my life!" Then he said loudly, "Please, you can milk the cow on your own!" He pushed Ananda into the shed and closed the door of the shed and walked away.

Ananda faced a dilemma because according to Buddhism, monks cannot milk a cow with their hands. In this situation, if he didn't milk, how could he accomplish his task? If he went back with empty hands, how could he prevent the Brahmans from laughing at him? As he knew nothing about the fierce cow, he had to go up to the cow slowly.

Just at that time, a kid who was about 12 or 13 years old, ran into the shed and grabbed the alms bowl from Ananda's hand and said to him, "Your honorable, don't get close to the cow! It's a very fierce cow and would kill any strangers. You just wait for me here. Let me milk the cow for you!"

"No, no!" said Ananda in a hurry. "Thank you for your kind offer but if the cow is very fierce, how could I ask you to help me? Let me do it myself."

They argued but no one gave up. As they got closer to the cow, the kid caught the alms bowl and put it under the cow and started to milk it. The bowl started to fill up with white milk. To the people's surprise, the fierce cow was like a sheep, standing there still and letting the kid milk her.

The people all marveled and worried about the kid. After a while, the alms bowl was full of milk and the kid handed it to Ananda. Before Ananda thanked him, he ran away and disappeared quickly.

The Brahmans were so surprised with what they saw that they whispered to each other, "In the past, the cow was so fierce that no one could get close to it. Why is it so calm today when the monk came to milk it? It must be because the monk has some magic power that can tame the cow. We must be in the wrong if we don't believe in Buddhism. We must change our religion to Buddhism, believe in him and worship him."

From then on, under the edification of Buddha Sakyamuni, Māyini and

his 500 disciples, as well as the king, ministers, and his people all started to believe in the Three Treasures, the Buddha, the Law, and the Order. They removed themselves from the dirty world through the practice and study of Buddhism. Later on, they achieved the Bodhisattva dharma-eye under the edification of Buddha and became arhats.

After Buddha drank the milk brought by Ananda, his illness was cured and he was as healthy as before. In fact, the reason why Buddha sent Ananda to beg for milk from Māyini was to save them and make them believe in Buddhism.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

67

Water-moon Avalokitesvara

Cave 164, High Tang Dynasty, 848-906

Once upon a time, northern troops invaded the south and attacked the city of Suzhou. After a furious battle, the south lost the city and the north gained control. The north killed anyone they saw in the street and the invading army pillaged the town. Thousands of people were killed and their bodies were piled up everywhere in the city. Bodhisattva Guanyin saw this and felt sorry for the people there. So one day, she turned into a beautiful middle-aged woman and went to Suzhou and built a high stage beside a lake in the city. Holding a Buddhist vase filled with a willow branch in her hand, she sat cross-legged on the stage and chanted sutras of Maha karunlikacitta-dha ranli. Whenever she finished chanting 1,000 times, she would dip the branch in the water of the vase and cast it around her. Then, she would put the branch back and continue chanting the sutras in order to release people's souls from suffering.

A few days later, the city began to recover from the ruins and people were surprised to see a beautiful lady sitting on the high stage. They all gathered to see and talk about her. The beautiful lady saw that the people were suspicious of her. She said, "Don't be suspicious of me, I'm not coming here to collect money nor do I beg for alms. I came here to build the stage and chant sutras in order to release the suffering souls of the people who were killed by the northern troops. On the forty-ninth day, please come back again to listen to my preaching."

On hearing this, the people, still uncertain of the woman, left.

When the forty-ninth day arrived, people gathered around the stage in the evening. The lake reflected the bright moon and the beautiful lady was still sitting on the high stage. She then started to preach to the people around.

"Please listen to me. Today I will chant sutras called the Dharani Spell

Book of the Thousand-hand, Thousand-eye, Bodhisattva who regards the world's sounds with a vast, wholly perfect, unimpeded, and greatly compassionate heart. This will release the suffering of all the souls."

She raised her Buddhist vase and said, "In this vase is some honeydew. I will cast it around me. If you get a drop of it, you will go and live in the happy land. In order to release the suffering of the people here, I have chanted sutras for 49 days. Today I will finish and go somewhere else."

The people knelt down to thank the lady as she spoke. The words of Bodhisattva Guanyin struck a man in the crowd and he thought,"Why did this nun ask nothing but to chant the sutras for the suffering people? Is she the Bodhisattva Guanyin who saves the people from their suffering? Since she is holding a Buddhist vase with a poplar and willow branch in it, she must be a Bodhisattva. We would be blessed if she showed us her presence or power."

He slipped through the crowd and went up close to the stage, knelt down in front of it and said, "I heard that Bodhisattva Guanyin traveled around the world and showed her presence and power. Could we be lucky enough to see her presence and power?"

The beautiful lady smiled and said, "Your heart is Buddha and Buddha is in your heart. If you want to see the presence of Bodhisattva, you must be genuine and sincere."

Then she raised her hand and pointed to the lake and said, "Don't you see that Bodhisattva is right at the center of the lake?"

The people looked in the direction the lady pointed at and saw a bright moon exactly at the center of the lake. The moon was glowing and very enchanting. Bodhisattva Guanyin walked slowly and elegantly into the shade of the moon. Her image reflected on the waves of the lake and was shining among the light of the moon which turned the sky into day. The people saw the miracle and they all knelt down to pray. When they stood up again, the beautiful lady had disappeared from the high stage.

Then people knew the lady on the high stage was the embodiment of Bodhisattva Guanyin. Thereupon, many people donated money and built a nunnery to Guanyin at the place where the lady had chanted sutras. They also molded a statue of Bodhisattva Guanyin chanting the sutras and casting the dew. Many people came to the nunnery to pray to the Bodhisattva every day.

That evening, among the crowd who saw Bodhisattva Guanyin, there was a man named Qiu Ziqing who was a well-known local painter and sincere Buddhist. When the reflection of Bodhisattva Guanyin appeared in the lake, it left a deep impression on him. After he returned home, he quickly painted Bodhisattva Guanyin in the lake under the bright moon. The painting showed a vivid scene of Bodhisattva Guanyin, the moonlight, and the lake. Everyone who saw the painting was shocked by his superb and incredible skills. Since then, the image of Bodhisattva Guanyin appearing in the lake under the moonlight has been called "Water-moon Avalokitesvara."

Translated by Xu Zhijun

68

King Bimbisara Prayed for a Son and Incurred Ill Will

East Wall, Cave 171, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

In the distant past of the human world lived a cruel and ferocious king named Bimbisara. He led a life of debauchery. However, he was unhappy because he had no son to succeed him to the throne although he was over 50 years old. The king was upset and ill-tempered and the ministers were forced to stay away from him.

The queen sent messengers out to pray to deities but all efforts were in vain. Strangely enough, a diviner came to the royal palace one day offering to tell the king's fortune.

The diviner said that the king could certainly have a son. "There is an immortal monk in the southern mountains. He will soon pass away in three years and will be reborn into your family." The diviner told the king to be patient.

The king was very happy when he heard this news, but whenever he thought about waiting three years he became uncomfortable and murmured to himself, "I am now over 50 and there is still no son to succeed me. I can wait no longer."

He sent guards to the southern mountains to order the immortal to die immediately but the immortal refused the king's order.

"Go back and tell the king," said the immortal, "that my life has not yet come to its end. The king is utterly heartless. If I became his son, I would demand the same of him. I would ask him to die."

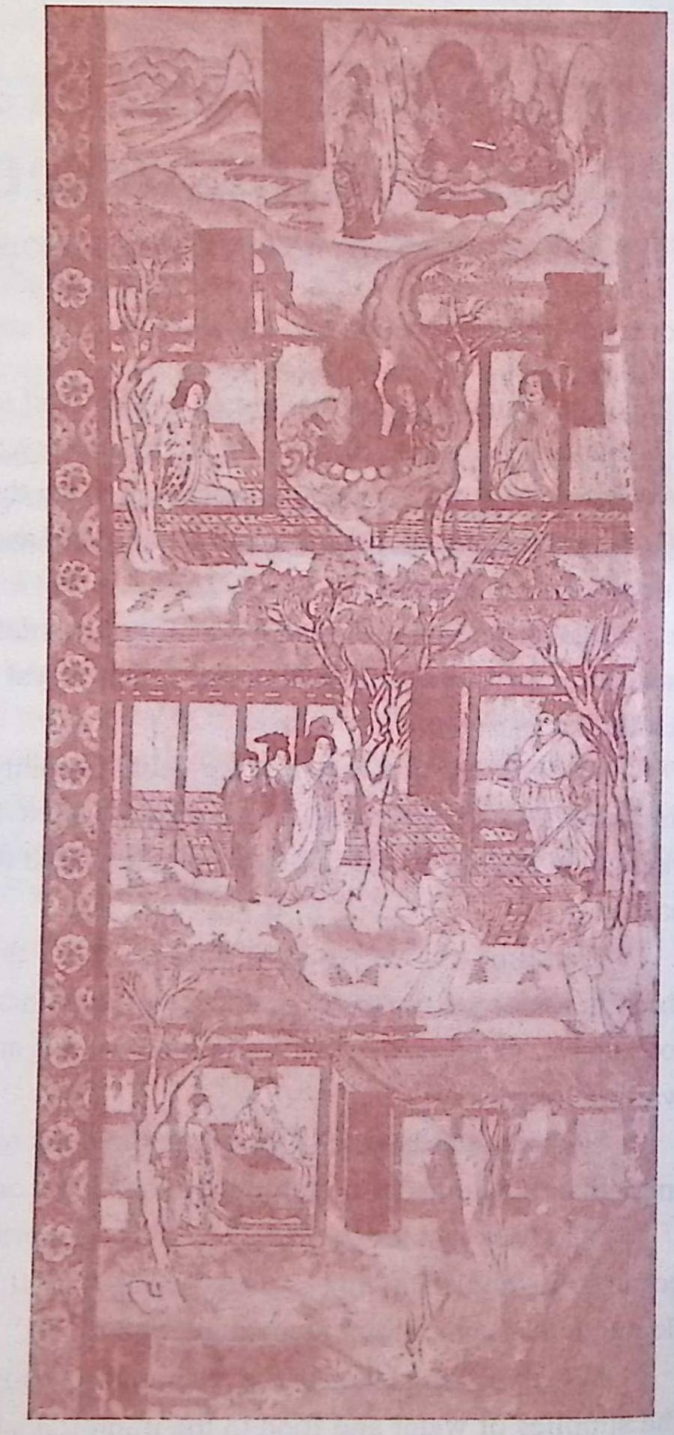
When the king learned that the immortal had refused his order, he cut off the supplies of water and food to the immortal's home in order to starve the

immortal to death.

Seven days later, the king discovered that the immortal was still alive, so the king sent the guards to the southern mountains to urge the immortal to die. The immortal cursed the king severely. In order to obey the king's order, the guards killed the immortal. They went back to the palace and told the king what they had done to the immortal.

Several months passed and the queen was still not pregnant. The diviner was summoned to the palace and the king threatened him with death if he lied.

"Calm down, calm down, Your Majesty. I dare not deceive you. The immortal died suddenly and became a hare in the royal garden and will become your son after the hare dies. So please wait, do not act with undue



haste. There will be a subsequent calamity if you kill the hare."

"I cannot wait any longer," the king bellowed.

The king lost his patience and ordered the soldiers to search for the hare in the garden. It turned out that there was a hare under a tree and it was unable to find a place to hide so it was caught and the king nailed it to the tree.

Soon after, the queen became pregnant and the king was overjoyed.

Nine months later a prince was born. King Bimbisara became wild with joy and named the prince Ksemadarsin.

In a twinkling of an eye, the prince became an adult. King Bimbisara was now quite old and was hard of hearing and dim-sighted, so he transferred the throne to the prince.

One day, Prince Ksemadarsin went for an outing in the outskirts of the city. He met the diviner who began chanting to the prince repeatedly, "Pity, pity, great pity. You should treat your parents as your enemies. The prince is indeed an Ajatasatra. It is wrong to show blind obedience to the tyrant king."

The prince was surprised by what he heard so he asked the diviner to tell him why he was insulting him and why the diviner was calling him an Ajatasatra. Why should he treat his parents as enemies? The diviner told the prince how the king ordered the killing of the immortal and the hare.

After hearing the story, the prince went back to the palace and locked his father in a cell. Soldiers guarded the seven gates to the cell so no one could go into the cell to see the king or bring him any food. The prince wanted to starve the king to death.

When Queen Vaidehi learned that the king was imprisoned, she felt as if a knife pierced her heart. She pleaded and got permission from the prince to visit her husband. She secretly coated herself with a layer of buttered honey and dried roasted cakes. She filled her ornaments with grape juice and went to the cell to visit the king.

The king ate the cakes and drank the syrup that the queen brought into the cell. Things went on like this for three weeks. Therefore, the king was not starved but actually healthier.

One day the prince came to see if his father had died but found him better than usual. When the guards told him what the queen had brought and how she fed the king, he was outraged. He then put the queen into the inner palace and would not allow her to see the king. Meanwhile, he cut off all supplies to the king and seven days later the king died of starvation.

When the queen was informed of the king's death she grieved deeply. She put her palms together, prostrated herself before the Buddha and begged, "Your Majesty, I am now deep in the palace, sad and miserable. I cannot understand why I gave birth to such an evil son. What wrongs had I done before?"

Tears were flowing from her eyes as she talked to the Buddha. Tathagata, the Buddha appeared in the sky. The queen raised her head and saw the Buddha sitting on the hundred-treasure lotus throne in the sky.

Tathagata, the Buddha told her how the king had killed the immortal and the hare and then said, "You and the king committed sins so you have received retribution."

After hearing the Buddha's explanation the queen begged, "I hope Your Majesty will have pity on me and teach me the Buddhist disciplines. I will give up my evil ways and return to good. I swear I won't do any evil things, nor will I listen to evil words, nor see evil people. I wish to be transmigrated to the Pure Land."

Every day she chanted the scriptures the Buddha taught her and she was transmigrated to the Pure Land when she died.

69

16 Self-contemplations

Cave 188, High Tang Dynasty, 848-906

Since Queen Vedehi was immured in her palace, (though she was not killed by her son), she was indignant and worried about the old king. She didn't understand why the world was so cruel to her and why her own son was so mean spirited. She kept asking herself whether she had done something wrong to receive such harsh punishment. She was awake all night and pondered deeply for a long time but no answers came to her. She thought of Buddha and prayed to the direction of Lingjiu Mountain where Buddha lived and said, "Buddha Tathagata, when my husband was in prison, you sent your disciples to preach to us. Now, my son has immured me, too. I feel hurt and sad. I hope I can see you again before I die!" In tears, she prayed to Buddha who was far away from her.

There in Lingjiu Mountain, Buddha Sakyamuni sensed the prayers of Queen Vedehi. He flew to her with Moggallana, Ananda and other gods.

Queen Vedehi saw the sky suddenly turn into bright colorful lights and flowers were falling down in great numbers. In a golden purple aureole, Buddha Sakyamuni was sitting on a treasured lotus throne. Moggallana was on his left side and Ananda was on his right side and all the other gods were standing behind him. They landed in her palace slowly from the sky.

Seeing Buddha Sakyamuni in front of her, Queen Vedehi was so sad that she fell on the ground and cried to Buddha, "Your Honorable Buddha, what was wrong with us to have such a ferocious son?"

Buddha Sakyamuni smiled and said, "Yes, you did do something wrong! Remember the old king starved the old monk to death? Remember that he killed the white rabbit?"

"Buddha, I understand. It's our fault that we were too eager to have a son and made the mistake. Please preach to us to free us from the sufferings and

make me get away from this evil world and lead me to a purer and quieter land."

Ah, the suffering of Vedehi was as big as Sumeru and her sadness was like thousands of needles piercing her heart! She was so eager to get away from this suffering world and go to the land that was bright and pure.

A golden light suddenly radiated between the eyes of Buddha and lit the thousands of lands of the world, and the purest lands of Buddhism appeared in front of Queen Vedehi. Seeing that, Vedehi said to Sakyamuni, "Buddha, though these lands are pure and have the lights of mystery, I'd rather go to the Western Pure Land where it's the land of Amitabha. Please show me the way to get there!"

Buddha Sakyamuni smiled and then five-colored lights came out from his mouth. Each of the lights went to the head and body of King Bimbisara. Though the king was in the prison, the wall of his cell did not block his vision. He prayed to Buddha and listened to the preaching. Soon he became an arhat and did not suffer the living and death again.

Buddha slowly took back his colorful lights and said to the queen, "The

Western world of Amitabha is not far away from here. You must be devout to it and ponder upon the preaching. I will preach to you the doctrines of practicing Buddha Amitabha. The people who practice it will be led to the Western Pure Land."

Then Buddha Sakyamuni started to preach to Queen Vedehi, "People who practice Pure Land doctrines should follow three principles. First, respect his parents and his teachers and practice The Buddhabhasita Dasabhadra Karmamarga Sutra. Second, follow the Three Treasures, the Buddha, the Law and the Order. Thirdly, believe in cause and effect. Have a Bodhi heart and read the sutras of Mahayana."

Vedehi then asked him, "Buddha, after I practice the three ones, how can I imagine and see the Pure Land that is ten trillion miles away in the Western world?"

Buddha said, "You should concentrate your mind, sit cross-legged, and focus to think about the Western world. Start from your past experiences and then turn them into your world of imagination. You can start imagining the sunset by opening and closing your eyes. This is called contemplation of the sun and it's the primary stage of contemplation."

"Buddha, what should we do next?" Queen Vedehi asked with humbleness.

"After you finish the contemplation of the sun, you can go to the second stage called contemplation of water. You should imagine that everything in the Western world is in blue, pure seawater. Then the water changes into a frozen sea and the frozen sea turns into a transparent and pure world of colored glaze. In that world, there are thousands of pavilions built by hundreds of treasures. Above the pavilions are numerous flower curtains and musical instruments. Those instruments play the music of bitterness, futility, impermanence, and anatta. This is the second way of contemplation called contemplation of water."

After that, Buddha went on to explain the 16 contemplations: contemplation of the earth, contemplation of the trees, contemplation of the eight merits and virtues of water, contemplation in general, contemplation of flower stage, contemplation of common conscience, and contemplation of peculiar conscience, etc.

When Buddha was preaching the 16 contemplations to Queen Vedehi and

her 500 maids, they saw Buddha Amitabha, the Goddess of Mercy, and the Three Masters of Buddhism. They were full of joy and realized that in the past they all had proved intolerant. Vedehi and the 500 maids got a Bodhi heart and were willing to be born into the Western Pure Land. Buddha Sakyamuni listened to their prayers and said, "If you keep practicing the methods everyday from now on, all of you will go to the Western Pure Land."

Translated by Xu Zhijun

70

A Fight Between Raudrakasa and Sariputra

West Wall, Cave 196, Late Tang Dynasty, 923-936

The shocking news that the prince and Sudatta spent a fortune to build a Buddhist monastery for Buddha quickly spread around the country. It was like dropping a bomb among the people and everyone talked about it. The state master of Kosala, Six Heretical Masters and Brahmans were wrathful when they heard the news. The Six Heretical Masters hurried to the palace and planted false evidence against them in front of the king, "Your Majesty, the prince and Sudatta made friends with devils and wanted to captivate our people secretly. It's really a heinous crime. The head of the heresy, Siddhartha, calls himself Buddha when in fact he is a pauper who doesn't take care of his parents nor respects his king. If he comes to our country to preach, I'm afraid he will ruin us. Please ban him from entering our country."

The king ordered the prince and Sudatta to come to his palace and asked them, "Why didn't you tell me you made friends with devils to ruin our country?"

Monk Sudatta told the king about the family background, the origin and the development of the wisdom, virtues and the power of Buddha. The king was very happy after he heard that, but verbal statements could not covince the king and he wanted to see for himself. He asked Sudatta, "You said Buddha was very powerful. Can you invite him to fight with our state master?"

Sudatta said, "There is no need to make a fuss to trouble Buddha. His disciple, Sariputra, could defeat the state master."

"Ok, ask him to come and fight with our state master," said the king. "However, remember my words. If Sariputra wins, all the people of our country and I will change to believe in Buddhism. If our state master wins, you will

stop building the monastery and be sentenced to death." They decided the time and place of the fight.

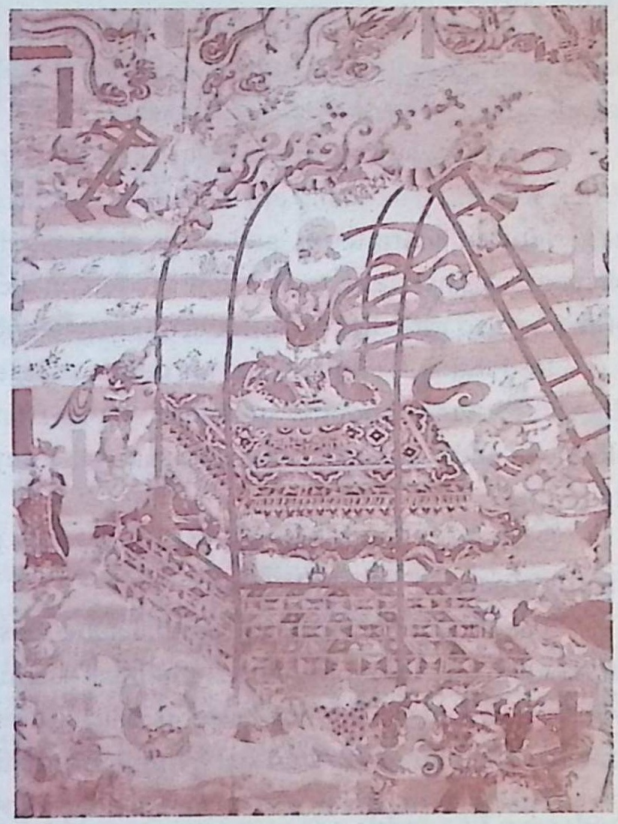
When the day of the fight came, the king, together with his officials and all the people who lived in the town attended the fight.

After the fight started, the state master sent Raudrakasa, who is a master of theurgy, to fight with Sariputra. Raising his head high in the air, Raudrakasa swaggered about and gave himself airs. He sat on the high stage and on the opposite side was Sariputra sitting and saying with a strong sense of righteousness, "You planted false evidence against Buddhism and that will make you lose peoples' assistance. What theurgy do you have? Just show it to me!"

On hearing that, Raudrakasa jumped from the stage and turned himself into a big tree with flourished branches and an assortment of fruit. The people were shocked by that and were struck with admiration. Sariputra took his time to blow from his mouth, which changed into a strong wind and forced the big tree into the air and it disappeared instantly. People shouted and cheered.

In the first round of the fight, Raudrakasa was defeated, but he couldn't accept it. He then conjured a lake of pure water in front of the people's eyes. The sculptures around the lake were stately and the lotus flowers in the lake were all in bloom. Sariputra turned into a white elephant with six long ivories in its mouth. On every piece of ivory there were seven lotus flowers and on

each lotus flower there were seven fairies playing music. The white elephant came to the lake and drank the water with its long nose. The lake dried up quickly. The state master's face turned pale and the people nearby were also amazed.



Seeing that it didn't work, Raudrakasa conjured a steep hill. There were many pavilions on it and clouds floated around the hill. Beautiful music was playing and people could see fairies riding on the cranes. The people shouted, "Marvelous! Marvelous!" Raudrakasa was gloried with his work. Instantly, Sariputra turned into a vajra holding a huge pestle in his hand and waved it at the hill. The hill was in ashes within a second.

Being defeated again, Raudrakasa became quite distressed and conjured a blue-green dragon exhaling smoke. Suddenly it was storming and thundering. People were frightened by the scene but Sariputra was not shocked by it. He turned into a huge bird with golden wings and flew into the sky to fight with the dragon. After several rounds, the bird ate the dragon.

The king couldn't sit still any longer. He was angry with his state master who he believed and trusted so much. He said, "How dare you boast to me in the past that you cannot be defeated. You cannot even beat the disciples of Buddha! If you still have anything left, show us. It's the time to decide who is going to win this fight!"

Raudrakasa was not proud any more but, as the king ordered him to go back and fight with Sariputra, he turned into a black ox with sharp horns and red eyes and dashed toward Sariputra.

Sariputra stood still without flinching or displaying any signs of fear. When the black ox came closer to him, he turned into a white lion that has a large mouth, sharp teeth, and glowing eyes. He rushed towards the ox. The black ox was half dead with fright and fell on the ground. The lion bit the throat of the ox and tore the hair from its body and gobbled it up.

Raudrakasa didn't accept his defeat so he turned into two devils exhaling flames from their mouths and black smoke from their noses. Their eyes were blood red and their teeth were sharp as iron. They rushed towards Sariputra like lightning.

Sariputra turned into the Devarajas who frightened the devils so much that they begged for forgiveness.

Then King Pasenadi said to the state master with severity, "I gave you money and silk and took you as my most distinguished guest but today I saw with my own eyes that your power is much lower than the Buddha's. I think it's time for you and me to start believing in Buddhism."

The state masters were ashamed and followed their king's order.

After Sariputra defeated the state master, the king ordered the whole country to build the monastery. Before long, the splendid monastery was complete and Buddha Sakyamuni came to preach to all the citizens of Shravasti.

Superior Sudatta discovered that he had forgotten about his youngest son's marriage. He chose the day and set off to Humi's home to bring the beautiful daughter of Sudatta back to his home to host the wedding ceremony for them.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

71

Two Sons Persuaded Their Father to Believe in Buddhism

Cave 217, High Tang Dynasty, 705-780

A long time ago, in ancient India there was a king called Marvelous Adornment. His wife was called Virtue of Purity and they had two sons. The older one was named Pure Treasure and the younger one was named the Pure Eye. The two boys believed in Buddhism and practiced the Bodhisattva Precept Section of the Net Sutra. They gained the 37th level of the assisting method and magic power. Under her sons' influence, their mother also started to believe in Buddhism. Only their father, the king, believed in Brahman instead of Buddhism.

At that time, Megha-dundubhi-svara-raja was the abbot and preached the Lotus Sutra under the Seven-Treasure Tree. He invited the brothers and their parents to come and listen to his preaching. The brothers went to the palace and told their mother about the invitation. The queen said, "Your father believes in Brahman. Nonetheless, I will persuade him to follow Buddhism today. Let me invite him to listen to the Lotus Sutra so that our people will follow the religion."

Pure Treasure said, "Mother, it's really a pity that my father doesn't believe in Buddhism."

"Please don't complain about that. You don't want your father to go to the 18th hell, do you? We should figure out a good way to make him reject his old belief and become a Buddhist," his mother said.

The queen thought of an idea and told her sons, "Ok, I have an idea. Your father believes in the magic power very much. Why don't you show him the

magic power you have practiced? Let's show him the power of Buddhism!"

They went to the garden of the palace and invited King Marvelous Adornment to come into the garden. Pure Treasure and Pure Eye went up to their father and greeted him, "Father, through the practice of Buddhism, we have gained magic power!"

"Ok, why don't you show it to your father?" the queen said.

"Yes, mother!" They uttered magic words that made them leap into the air. They were like eagles flying in the sky and within a second they disappeared from the eyes of the king and queen. Just as King Marvelous Adornment was looking around for them, the brothers were flying back like arrows. They floated above the garden and circled it. Suddenly, flames shot from their mouths and made the earth dry and hot. The people standing on the ground felt thirsty and their clothes were wet with sweat. A jet of water sprang from the brothers' mouths and it became cool and refreshing again. After that, the brothers came back to the ground and turned into giants with their heads in the sky and feet on the ground. Suddenly, they became smaller and smaller until they were as small as a thimble. They jumped off the table, turned their backs, and dug into the earth. After a while, they appeared in the lake of the garden and walked fast along the surface."

King Marvelous Adornment stared at the magic of his sons and felt very happy. He called them back and asked, "How did you learn such powerful magic? Tell me who taught you that magic!"

"Father, our teacher is the Megha-dundubhi-svara-raja. He's the Buddha who gave us the powerful magic."

"Where is the Buddha?"

"He is preaching the Lotus Sutra under the Bodhi tree. He sent us to invite you to listen to his preaching."

The king talked to himself. "My sons are not monks but they have practiced such powerful magic. If one day they become monks, who knows how powerful they will be? Maybe they are right that Buddhism is really powerful." He told the boys, "Ok, now that I have seen your powerful magic with my own eyes, I believe Buddhism is powerful. From now on, I will believe in it and give up my old beliefs."

The brothers were very happy. They thanked their parents and said, "Father and mother, now all of our family believe in Buddhism. Could you allow us to become monks so that we can devote ourselves to Buddhism?"

The parents accepted their request and both the brothers became monks. Then, led by Pure Treasure and Pure Eye, the king and queen, together with the officials, relatives and maids went to the place where Buddha lived. They knelt down in front of the Buddha and circled around Buddha three times and then listened to him preach the Lotus Sutra.

Since King Marvelous Adornment came to believe in Buddhism, he chanted sutras and prayed to Buddha every day. Later he got the Bodhisattva dharma-eye and became Bodhisattva Hua De. Everyone began believing in Buddhism and prayed to him. Ever since then, the country started to have seasonable weather for growing crops and, plentiful grain harvest every year, and it became stronger and stronger.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

72

Budhisattva Manjusri Visited the Sick Vimalakirti

East Wall, Cave 220, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-704

In Vaisali, there lived a secular devotee named Vimalakirti. He cultivated himself according to Buddhist doctrines for several generations and had provided alms to numerous Buddha. He was proficient in Buddhism and good at debate. He could simplify the theories of Mahayana and make everyone understand it. He often went to the hotels, gambling places or whorehouses to preach to the people and was highly commended by Buddha Sakyamuni .

One day a Buddhist named Accumulator of Jewels heard that Buddha Sakyamuni was preaching at the Amacron of the town and took the sons of 500 elders and secular devotees to the garden to listen to the Buddha preach. To their surprise, Vimalakirti was not there to listen to the preaching. Someone told them that Vimalakirti was sick and couldn't come that day.

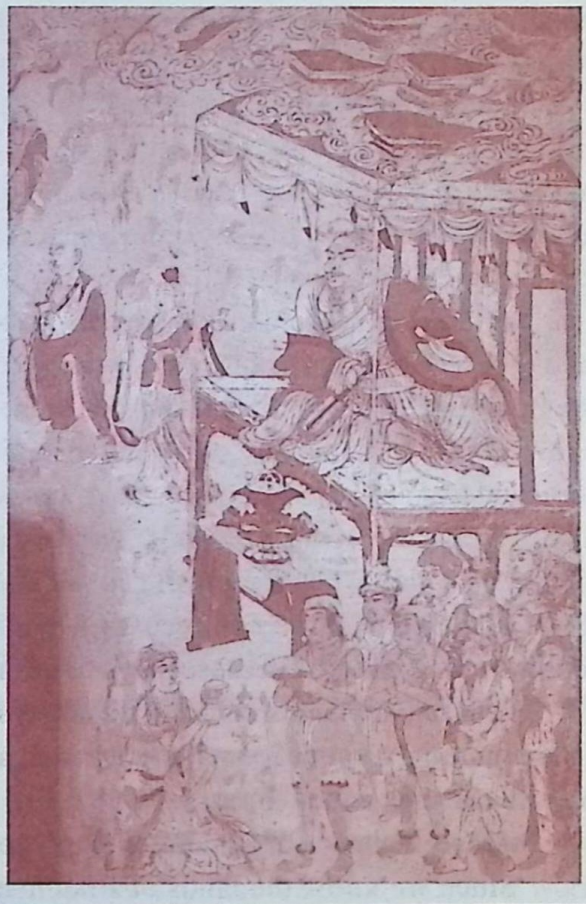
Buddha knew that his disciples were doubtful about Vimalakirti's illness so he sent someone to visit the sick Vimalakirti. First, Buddha asked Sariputra to go but was refused by him. Then he asked Moggallana to go but Moggallana refused him too. Then Buddha asked Kasyapa and other disciples but they all said that they were not talented enough to take the task of visiting the sick Vimalakirti.

Refused by his disciples, Buddha had to ask the Bodhisattvas and the children but they all refused, too. Finally, Buddha said to Bodhisattva Manjusri who was standing beside him, "Bodhisattva Manjusri, only you can help me visit the sick Vimalakirti."

Bodhisattva Manjusri thought,"No one wanted to take this task but I'm the Bodhisattva who waits upon Buddha. It's my job to help him get over this

difficulty."

On hearing that, Buddha was very happy.



The disciples, Bodhisattvas and vajras heard that Bodhisattva Manjusri would go to visit the sick Vimalakirti so they wanted to go with him and listen to the talk between the two masters of Buddhism. The 8,000 Bodhisattvas, 500 disciples and thousands of Buddhists went with Bodhisattva Manjusri to listen to their conversation.

Vimalakirti, however, pretended to be sick and didn't go to the Amacron to listen to the sermon. He wanted to talk about the wonderful ideas of the sutras of Mahayana. Therefore, the disciples who didn't accept the sutras would change their ideas. He knew that Bodhisattva Manjusri had taken the Buddhists to visit him so he used his magic power and removed all the furniture and possessions in his home except his bed. Then Bodhisattva Manjusri arrived and all the Buddhists entered his room. They saw the room was bare and that Vimalakirti was lying on his bed looking ill. When Vimalakirti saw everyone enter the room, he sat up and spoke first in order to gain the initiative.

"Bodhisattva Manjusri, it's good that you come and visit me!"

Bodhisattva Manjusri answered, "I agree with you! When we said we wanted to come, we had better not to come. When we said we wanted to go, we had better not to go. Why do we say that? Because coming has no place to come

and going has no place to go. For what we can see, we actually can't see anything at all."

Bodhisattva Manjusri continued.

"Let's put this topic aside for a while and talk about your illness. The Buddha deeply cares about your health and asked me to visit you. Do you feel better now? How long have you been sick? Is there anything that could cure your illness?"

Vimalakirti answered, "People become sick because of love. If everyone gave up his or her illness of love, I would recover from my illness naturally. The Bodhisattvas are born and then die for the people. If there is life and death in this world, for sure there will be illness. If there's no life and death in this world and people are released from the illness of love, the Bodhisattvas will not fall ill again. If the Bodhisattvas take everyone as their children, the Bodhisattvas will become sick when the people are sick too. If people recover from their illness, the Bodhisattvas will recover from their illness. The reason that the Bodhisattvas are sick is because they are infinitely merciful."

Bodhisattva Manjusri noticed the empty room and asked,"My friend, why is there nothing in your room? You are sick and lying in the bed but why are there no servants around?"

"Aren't the lands of Buddhism empty too?" Vimalakirti answered.

"Since we know the lands of Buddhism are empty, why do we try to use all kinds of methods and useless wisdom to observe it and prove they're empty?" Bodhisattva Manjusri said.

"Only when we observe everything in this world with real wisdom and without any biased opinions can we understand that their original existence is empty. Through this can we understand the principle that the lands of Buddhism are empty," Vimalakirti answered.

"Are there any differences between the emptiness of original existence and of the lands of Buddhism?"

"Only when we rid the differences can we say it's a real emptiness," Vimalakirti said.

During their enthusiastic talk, Sariputra, who was standing beside them, thought, "Why are there no chairs in the room? Where can we sit?"

To his surprise, Vimalakirti had already become aware of these thoughts and asked him, "Sariputra, did you come to listen to our talk or to sit?"

Sariputra answered in a flurry, "Of course I came here to listen to your instruction."

Then Vimalakirti asked Manjusri, "Bodhisattva, you are very knowledgeable and have traveled to many lands of Buddhism. Do you know where in the Buddhist lands we can find the thrones of virtues?"

"Devotee, 36 Ganges east of this country, there's a place called the world of Sumeru. The Buddha in this world is called King Sumeru. He has the largest, most ornamented, and cleanest thrones," answered Bodhisattva Manjusri.

Vimalakirti heard this and began to use his magic power to borrow the thrones from Buddha Sumeru. Then, King Sumeru sent 32,000 thrones to the room of Vimalakirti so everyone in the room had a place to sit.

Seeing this wonder with his own eyes, Sariputra said to Vimalakirti, "Devotee, I would never have imagined that so many thrones could fit in such a small room! It's amazing!"

"Sariputra, the Buddha has an unimaginable way of relief," said Vimalakirti. "If the Bodhisattvas learned the method, he could put the Sumeru into a mustard seed without reducing its size. They could pour the sea into a pore and not bother the life of fish. It's because both the Sumeru and the sea

have a nature of freedom."

Just as Vimalakirti, Bodhisattva Manjusri and Sariputra were talking about the wonderful thoughts of sutras of Mahayana, a fairy appeared in the room and sprinkled many flowers on the people. It was surprising that the flowers that fell on the Bodhisattvas fell on the ground, while the flowers that fell on the disciples remained on them. No matter how hard they shook their body, the flowers would not fall. The fairy then explained to the disciples,"The flowers have shown you the law of Buddhism. Though there's no difference among the flowers, you have classified yourselves. The flowers didn't remain on the Bodhisattvas because they had given up the ideas of classification."

Then the two masters and the Buddhists talked about the abstract principles of the sutras of Mahayana, such as the way of becoming a Buddha and how a Bodhisattva enters a unique Buddhism gate. In their talk, Vimalakirti explained his ideas of emptiness in the sutras of Mahayana and criticized the trend amongst the disciples of satisfying self-relief and the unbalance in their pursuit, practice and comprehension of Buddhism. He also explained to the Buddhists the ideas of the unique Buddhism gate of Mahayana and the methods of practice. Vimalakirti's talents and words shocked everyone and all the Buddhists started to admire his wisdom and realized just how much they learned from their visit.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

73

King Udayana Made a Statue of Buddha

Cave 231, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

After Sakyamuni turned the Dharma Wheel for the first time at Deer Park and became a Buddha, he accepted many disciples and preached to them everyday. However, as time went by, the disciples became tired of his sermons. Sometimes they left early and sometimes they were late to his preaching. Buddha thought, "They are tired of me and my preaching because I have been staying with them every day. I should leave for a while and come back to enlighten them when they really miss me."

So, one night he went to the 33rd heaven without telling anyone he was leaving. At first the Buddha's disciples were very happy when they saw that the Buddha had left. No one would be able to get a hold on them again. But after some time, the disciples started to miss the Buddha. The one that missed Buddha most was King Udayana of Shangmi. He missed Buddha so much that he didn't want to eat anything. So one day, he asked the altar boy Ananda about the whereabouts of the Buddha.

Ananda replied, "I don't know where the Buddha has gone either. He left us without any words."

Missing the Buddha, King Udayana then went back to his country. The trip itself was cold and weary. Upon arriving home, the king became quite ill yet he still could not eat and eventually he became gaunt. Very soon, the king could not deal with his country's affairs.

The king's officials worried about him and found the best doctors for him. But King Udayana said feebly, "No medicine can cure my illness. Only if I see the face of Buddha, can I recover from my illness. Otherwise, no one can save me!"

All the officials were in tears when they heard the words of the king. Then the prime minister stood up and said, "Your Majesty, you are sick because you miss the Buddha. In my opinion, we can invite a skillful craftsman to carve a Buddha statue and put it into the palace for you to pray to and worship everyday."

Hearing those words, King Udayana's spirits immediately rose. He sat up and said, "Excellent idea! Wonderful idea. Now, do it at once!"

Then the prime minister called many skillful craftsmen and asked them to carve a statue of Buddha. But one old man with white hair said with embarrassment, "Your Honor, it's not difficult to carve a statue but if you ask us to carve a statue of Buddha, it's difficult because none of us have ever seen the face of Buddha. Someone said he has 32 kinds of fortunes on his face and 80 kinds of goodness in him. How can we carve those features?"

"You are right," the prime minister said. "It's really hard to carve a statue whose features are the same as the Buddha's. But if there's no statue of Buddha, our king cannot recover from his illness. Therefore, no matter how many difficulties we have, we must carve the statue. Rare sandalwood has been prepared, please begin!"

The prime minister named the old man as the head of the craftsmen and gave them one month to carve the statue of Buddha. If the statue could be completed on time, every craftsman would get a reward. Unfinished, however, no one could return home.

Several days passed. The craftsmen still had no ideas. They worried whether they could finish it on time.

Then one engraver said, "To carve the statue, the key is to find a portrait. If the painters could draw the Buddha, we could carve it in our sleep!"

The painter said, "How can I draw Buddha without knowing what he looks like? It's impossible!"

The elder with white hair said, "The problem is that we can't find the Buddha. And now we don't even know where his closest disciple, Ananda, is. How can we make it?"

"We can't stay here doing nothing. I heard that there's an elder called Maudgalyayana, who is very powerful and could go into heaven and earth in the blink of an eye. Let's ask him for help!"

The old man with white hair went to see the elder monk and knelt down in front of him and begged him for help.

Maudgalyayana asked him to stand up and then made him sit down. Then he said, "It's really a good deed to carve the statue of the Buddha. There's no doubt that I'll try my best to help you. In fact, I don't know where Buddha has been, either. Last evening I met a fairy from the 33rd heaven. He told me that the Buddha was preaching to his mother there and would not come back soon. With his power, he knew that his disciples missed him very much so he asked me to give them a solution. Please choose some skillful painters and follow me to go paint a portrait of the Buddha."

Early next morning, when the bright red sun was rising and birds started to sing, Maudgalyayana used his magic power and took the three painters with him outside. Standing on pure white clouds they rose to the heavens. When Buddha went to the 33rd heaven, he went to the Rejoicing Garden to preach to his mother. That morning, after he finished his sermon, a servant arrived and told him that someone was asking to see him. Buddha knew that the painters were coming to visit him so he let them in.

Maudgalyayana took the painters in and knelt down in front of Buddha and told him their intention.

Buddha then sat on the Seven Treasure Stage with his legs crossed and his feet placed on lotus flowers. His left hand was on his knee and his right

hand held a seal of fearlessness. Buddha lowered his head and looked down at the painters with a smile at the corner of his mouth. His face was plump and his manner was solemn and benign. The painters utilized their superb skills and painted the Buddha's portrait carefully.

They were indeed very skillful craftsmen. After some time, they finished their paintings and all the three of them were the same! The Buddha was very satisfied with the paintings. Maudgalyayana then took them back to the human world.

The engravers saw the pictures of Buddha and it only took them 10 days to carve a statue of Buddha that was 15 feet tall.

King Udayana held a grand ceremony to invite the wooden carved statue and the painting of Buddha into his palace. Soon after that, he recovered from his illness.

King Pasenadi was very happy when he heard that King Udayana carved a statue of Buddha. He borrowed a painting of Buddha from King Udayana and ordered his skillful craftsmen to make a statue out of gold for him to worship. The wooden statue of Buddha and the golden one then became the earliest statues of Buddha in the world.

Three months later, after Buddha finished preaching to his mother, he returned from the 33rd heaven. When his disciples saw him, they were all overjoyed. From then on, they always appreciated the goodness and humility passed on to them.

The next day, the Buddha took his disciples to visit King Udayana. When he entered the hall where his statue was placed, a miracle happened—the wooden statue moved towards Buddha and greeted him. The disciples cheered and the hall was full of joy.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

74

Why Did Buddha Point to the Ground

West Niche, Cave 231, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Once upon a time in ancient India, there was a three-floored monastery on the east side of the Bodhi tree in the kingdom of Magadha. On the roof of the monastery, there was a clinquant copper vase. In every-room of the monastery, a golden statue could be seen in the shrine. There were beautiful sculptures on the walls as well as on the doors, pillars and windows, which were covered by gold and silver. Many rare stones and jade could also be seen in the monastery as ornaments. On the left side of the main hall there was a statue of Bodhisattva Avalokite. On the right side, there was a statue of Bodhisattva Maitreya. Both of them were 10 feet tall and made of pure silver. The statue in the middle was a tall clay statue of Buddha.

Long ago, there were two brothers who were Brahmans and they didn't believe in Buddhism. One day they heard that there was a fairy who had magic powers in the valley of jokul. So the brothers set off to visit him. When they entered the jokul and saw the fairy. The fairy said, "No matter what wishes you have, you must accumulate your virtues and good deeds. I have no way to help you if you don't practice the good virtues."

"Please tell us what kind of virtues we should practice?"

"Where do you live?"

"On the east side of the Bodhi tree where Buddha got his Nirvana."

"Oh, that's great! You should cast the virtue seeds and pray for the fortune land. The place around the Bodhi tree is the best place to practice Buddhism. Now, go back to your home quickly and build a large monastery near the Bodhi tree and dig a big pond beside it and host the worships. I'm sure you will attain your wishes if you accomplish this."

Given instructions from the fairy, the brothers began to believe in Buddhism without any doubts. After they went back to their home, they built the monastery and dug the pond and worshiped Buddha. Several years later, their wishes came true and they became high officials of the king and became very wealthy. They never forgot to worship Buddha and often donated money and alms to the monks.

Soon after the monastery was built, they posted a notice to hire a skillful craftsman to mold a statue of Buddha. But several years passed, no one came to accept the job. Then the brothers promised more money for the craftsman, but still no one came to them. Then several years later a Brahman came to their home and said to a monk in the monastery, "I come here to mold the statue of Buddha." The monks in the monastery were very happy because finally there was someone to mold the statue. They arranged boarding for the Brahman and asked him, "What kind of materials do you need to mold the statue? Do you need someone to help you?"

"I don't need anyone to help me, neither do I need any materials except some fragrant mud. Just prepare enough fragrant mud in the monastery and all the food and water I need. Also, please find a lamp for me and prepare enough oil for it. After I start to work, you should close all the doors and windows and lock them from the outside. Six months later, follow my orders if I approve to open them, but during the six months, no one should come in or peep inside."

The monks nodded their heads and started to prepare the things the Brahman needed.

Six months were about to pass and, the monks were surprised to find that there was no news from the Brahman. They decided to open the door to have a look. Four days before it reached six months, the monks opened the door. They saw that a new statue of Buddha Sakyamuni was on the lotus throne in the monastery. The statue sat cross-legged and was solemn and benign. He raised his right hand and opened it to the outside and pointed his fingers upwards. His left hand was on his leg. The 32 Buddhists virtues and 80 fortunes were all on the statue. When they got closer, however, they saw the right breast of Buddha was not polished yet and there was no color on it. Where was the Brahman? The monks looked around the whole monastery, but no one found him. Then they

realized that it was the spirit of gods who came to the monastery to mold the statue. But why did he come to mold the statue? Why did the left hand of Buddha pointing to the ground? No one could tell the answer.

One night, a monk saw the Brahman in his dream. The monk then hurried to him and asked, "Master, you built the statue in our monastery but I have some questions to ask you!"

The Brahman said, "I had seen what you wanted to ask me. That's why I came here to explain it to you. In fact, I'm Bodhisattva Maitreya. Because I heard no one could figure out the face and appearance of Buddha and no one could mold the statue of Buddha, I decided to come to the earth myself and mold the statue to leave a true appearance of Buddha to the people. Why does Buddha point his left hand to the ground? It's because when Buddha Sakyamuni was about to become a Buddha after six years, the devils went to prevent him. The god of the earth warned

Buddha in advance. However, the devil was nearing his home. A god of earth jumped out and wanted to help Buddha but Buddha told him to not be afraid and not to fight with him and that he could frighten them into submission with his power of Buddhist law and tolerance."

The devil sneered, "Don't boast to me! What if you can't beat us?"

"I will never preach again!"

"Then who will be the witness?"

Buddha pointed his left hand to the ground and said, "The witness is here."

"Yes, I'm the witness!" The second god of earth jumped out.

"Therefore, the left hand of the statue of Buddha Sakyamuni pointed to the ground." After he finished his words, the Brahman disappeared.

The next day, the monk told others about his dream. The monks were moved into tears and they started to worship Buddha more. They adorned the right breast of Buddha with jewelry and put a treasure crown on him. From then on, the statue twinkled with colorful lights regardless of what the hour was. People called it a statue of Buddha shining in lights. From then on, the statue became a model to mold the statue of Buddha for the later generations and the monastery became more and more prosperous.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

75

The Buddha with Two Heads

West Niche, Cave 231, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Long ago, some of the faithful commissioned artists carved statues of the Buddha or painted frescoes depicting the Buddha thereby earning merit and expressing their devotion to Buddhism.

One day a poor, shabbily dressed man came to see an artist who was painting frescoes of the Buddha on the wall of a cave. The poor man kneeled before the artist and touched his forehead to the ground. Baffled by this act of supplication and respect, the painter helped the man to his feet.

"Why do you kneel before me? I am not a Buddha," he said, indicating a statue of the Buddha beside him. "This is our savior."

"Please," the poor man begged pitifully, "grant me a favor."

"What do you need?" the painter asked. "Some money? Some clothes?"

"No, no," said the man, vehemently shaking his head. "Kind-hearted master artist, you misunderstand me. I am not here to beg. My wish is that you would paint a mural of the Buddha for me, right here, on this wall."

Carefully, the poor man extracted from his pocket a single gold coin and humbly offered it to the artist. "Master artist," he said sincerely, "I am very poor. To save this coin I have worked day and night skimping on food and expenses in order to save money and I have not taken a wife. I know that one gold coin is not enough for a mural painting, but it is all that I have. Please, accept it and paint a mural of Buddha on the cave wall for me."

Once he realized what the poor man wanted of him, the painter was faced with a dilemma. The poor man was very earnest and sincere and would be very disappointed if he said no. But if he accepted the commission, he knew that one gold coin would not cover the cost of the pigments required for the mural.

Moved by the man's poverty and his piety and devotion, the artist agreed to paint the mural. Tears of gratitude filled the poor man's eyes and ran down his cheeks as he thanked the artist. The next day, another poor man in shabby clothes came and prostrated himself before the painter.

"Kind sir," he began, "all of my life I have been poor. I have no family and have worked hard in order to save this one gold coin. You are a supremely skilled artist and I beg you to accept this coin as commission for painting a mural of the Buddha for me."

Moved by the poor man's sincerity, the painter accepted the coin and promised to create a Buddha mural for him as well.

Inspired by such genuine devotion to the Buddha, the painter purchased the pigments and set to work. He painted day and night giving scrupulous attention to every detail. Gradually, a solemn and lifelike image of the Buddha took shape on the cave wall.

Fifteen days later, the two poor men arrived at the artist's cave together. Delighted to see them, the artist pointed at the newly painted mural.

"This is for both of you! In truth, I have painted countless murals, but this is my masterpiece. You will love it!"

At a loss for words, the two poor men looked unhappily at the mural and then at the painter as the same thoughts raced through their minds. Although a single gold coin was not enough for a mural painting of the Buddha, each had wanted his own mural. Neither of them wanted to share their murals with the others.

"But, didn't you promise to paint a mural just for me?" asked the first poor man.

"Oh, my dear brothers," the artist exclaimed. "Don't worry. I haven't deceived you. This mural is very different from all the others. It is wondrous, because you are..."

As soon as the painter finished the painting, the painting itself automatically changed its form.

"Look!" one of the men cried out. "A miracle!"

The golden aura around the Buddha's head began to pulsate and emanate rays of brilliance in all directions. The figure of the Buddha in the mural trans-

formed into two Buddhas who smiled compassionately. They seemed to walk out of the mural as if they were alive. The Buddha mural vibrated for a moment, then the brilliant rays began to fade as the two Buddhas slowly merged into a single Buddha with two heads.

The two poor men fell to the ground in obeisance. They felt guilt for what they had said to the painter when they first looked at the mural.

"Please, forgive us for our ungrateful words. Your skill as an artist is unsurpassed and we are very thankful for what you have done for us."

From that time on, for generation after generation, the faithful have come to pray at the famous mural of the Buddha with Two Heads.

76

Bodhisattva Avalokite and Putuo Mountain

West Niche, Cave 231, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Located in east Zhoushan Islands of Zhejiang Province, Putuo Mountain is one of the four Buddhist Mountains in China known as a "Buddhist Heaven" and "Fairyland." Surrounded by mountains, trees, flowers, and temples, it is the place of enlightenment (place where the Taoist or Buddhist rites are performed) of Bodhisattva Guanyin. Why did Bodhisattva Guanyin choose Putuo Mountain as her Way-place?

During the Qianliang Dynasty, an eminent monk from Japan named Hui'E came to China to study Buddhism for the third time. He was wandering to Mount Wutai, the famous Buddhist mountain.

Hui'E was welcomed warmly by the abbot of Xiantong Temple. After dinner, the abbot led Hui'E in pilgrimage to Sakyamuni. Hui'E was so surprised to notice that beside Buddha stood a statue of Bodhisattva Guanyin made from rosewood with a "purity vase" in her hand. She stood on a lotus flower platform, in an enchanting and kind way.

Wutai Mountain was actually the place of enlightenment of Bodhisattva Manjusri, so why was Guanyin Bodhisattva placed there? Both Bodhisattva Manjusri and Bodhisattva Guanyin were attendants of Sakyamuni. Whenever people needed help, Bodhisattva Guanyin was there. That's why she was also placed in most temples.

For days, when Hui'E was making his pilgrimage to the rosewood Bodhisattva Guanyin statue, he was too excited to leave. He wanted to take the statue back to Japan, but it was embarrassing to raise the topic to the abbot.

After several days of hesitation, Hui'E decided to share his intentions, "Master, I've come from far away Japan. I was honored and excited to see the rosewood Bodhisattva Guanyin statue. Unfortunately, we do not have a

Bodhisattva Guanyin statue in Japan. I'm here for your approval to take the statue to Japan to save the Japanese people."

The abbot was upset and thought silently, "That's the evil reason why you were making a pilgrimage to the statue these days." Then he said, "I understand your sincerity. But taking the statue is quite significant. I will give you a reply after discussing with other monks and benefactors."

Three days later, when Hui'E revisited this issue, he was rejected.

Depressed Hui'E had sworn to take the statue home so he decided to take it by any means. In order to clear up suspicion by the temple, he moved to Tayuan Temple.

Months later, the abbot lowered his guard and believed that Hui'E was so far away that he couldn't do any harm. Then, in a dark night, Hui'E snuck into the temple and stole the statue out of Mount Wutai.

When monks found the statue missing the next morning, they figured out that Hui'E was the thief and were ready to chase him, but the abbot stopped them, "Just let him go due to his sincerity."

Carrying the statue but worrying about being chased, Hui'E made his journey home without a stop to the east, crossing the Yangtze River and getting ready to sail back to Japan.

In the afternoon, near Zhoushan Islands, a hurricane came and almost turned over the ship. Suddenly, Hui'E remembered the Chapter of the Univer-

sal Door of Bodhisattva Guanyin and asked for her help. At the same time, the ship became stable although the wind still blew. Thanks to the tide, the ship floated to peaceful Putuo Island and was anchored to wait for good weather to head for Japan.

The next morning, Hui'E asked the sailors to start their travels, but it was extremely foggy. The ship only wandered on the ocean. Then he gave up and waited for a nice day.

On the third day, the sun shone. He asked the sailors to start again. But this time many iron lotuses were floating by and surrounded the ship. People on the ship were astonished to witness the magic scene.

Smart Hui'E guessed that Bodhisattva Guanyin might be unwilling to be taken to Japan. So he knelt in front of the statue and made confession. In order to pay off his sin, Hui'E decided not to go back home, and he set up a temple for the statue where he currently was. After praying, a giant iron ox came out of the ocean and ate all the iron lotuses to make a path for the ship. When the ship was back to Chaoyin Cave, the iron ox as well as the lotuses disappeared.

Meanwhile, an old fisherman named Zhang descended from the mountain and said, "I've witnessed all of the strange things happening these days. Obviously god made all the difficulties, so please come to my home."

Hui'E told old Zhang the whole story of taking back the statue and then he showed him the statue.

Old Zhang happened to be a religious Buddhist and knelt in front of the statue. "Master, the reason why you've encountered so much hardship during sailing is Bodhisattva Guanyin is unwilling to go to Japan, but stay here. This indicates preordination. I'd like to empty my house, place the statue here, and invite you to be the abbot."

Looking around, Putuo Mountain had beautifully natural scenery, and Hui'E agreed and started to build a temple to house the statue.

Finally Hui'E did not return to Japan. Later on, with the assistance of old Zhang and other villagers, he built the first temple on Putuo Mountain. Buddhists named the temple the "Unwilling to Go Temple." Hui'E was the founder and first abbot there. Therefore, Putuo Mountain became the place of enlightenment of Bodhisattva Guanyin. Nowadays, Putuo Mountain owns three grand temples "Puji, Fayu and Huiji," 88 nunneries, and 128 huts. Thousands of Buddhists and visitors make pilgrimages every day.

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A Flying Sculpture of Tathagata

West Niche, Cave 237, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Khotan was a country located to the south of Xinjiang. It was one of the big powers among the 36 countries in the Western Regions once called as Kustana in ancient time, and Bimo was one of the cities in the country.

A long time ago, there was a Tathagata sculpture carved out of rosewood in the Bimo City. The figure was carved vividly. It was six meters high with a shining body. The Tathagata looked very friendly and amiable, and had miraculous powers. When a person was sick, if he or she put gold leaves on the corresponding part of the Tathagata's body, the pain would vanish immediately. The sick person would return to his or her healthy state.

The sculpture was made by King Udayana of Kausambi with great effort when Tathagata was still alive. But what surprised people was when it suddenly flew up into the sky upon the Nirvana of Tathagata. It flew and flew, and didn't stop until it arrived in Helaoluojia City.

Helaoluojia City was a nice place with wide streets, numerous stores and abundant products, where everyone enjoyed their lives. However, the people there believed in heathenism instead of Buddhism. When the flying sculpture fell down to the ground from the sky, people gathered together and talked about the strange occurrence.

One day, a Buddhist monk arrived from afar. With his head closely shaven, he was dressed in a magneta-colored cassock, and carried a Zen wand in his hands. The monk prostrated himself before the sculpture of Tathagata as soon as he saw it. After that, he traveled around the city. Wherever he went, he preached the power of Buddha to people, and tried to persuade the common

people of the city to follow Buddhism. This made the local heretics very fearful. They didn't want to see the people in the city change their beliefs, so they went to the local official and spoke a lot of ill words about the monk.

The lord flew into a rage at the news, and thus ordered the common people to insult the monk. Instigated, the people rushed to do the job like a swarm of bees. They started to attack the monk. Someone threw sand at the monk, someone hit him with soil clod and smeared mud on his body, and someone even smashed the monk's alms bowl into small pieces and threw his food away to the dogs. The monk was extremely offended and he subsequently suffered a lot from lack of food and water for several days.

Despite the attacks, however, a middle-aged man came up to help. He was the one who had been privately making offerings to the flying sculpture of Tathagata since it arrived at the city. After witnessing what had happened to the monk, he felt very indignant with his fellow neighbors and was determined to do something for the monk. So one night, he sent some food and water to the monk while other people were sleeping. For this, the monk was very grateful. Later, they became very good friends.

Realizing that it was difficult to propagate the power of Buddha in the

city, the monk decided to leave. So the man, his only friend in the city, saw him off on the day he left. At the departure, the monk said, "Devout disciple of Buddhism, my faithful friend, I think it will be hard for us to meet again after this departure. It is a shame that I came all the way here to propagate Buddhism to make all flesh break away from the abyss of misery, but the only result was a catastrophe like this. The Buddha will never forgive those ignorant disciples of heathenism. My supernatural power told me that on the seventh day of my departure there will be a disaster to the city. A horrible sandstorm together with a gale and rain will destroy the place. If you do believe in Buddhism, please trust me and get prepared to leave the city as early as possible. Otherwise, you will lose your life. Be sure to keep this to yourself!"

Hearing this, the man was very astonished. Immediately, he ran back to the city. He informed his family, his friends and neighbors of what the monk had told him. He tried very hard to persuade them to leave the city. But unfortunately, nobody believed him. Someone said he was talking nonsense, someone said he was obsessed and someone said he was drunk.

On the following day, the gale really came. It was so strong that it blew away everything on the street. On the third day after the monk's departure, it was a surprisingly peaceful and sunny day. From the sky fell a lot of money, valuables and luxuries. People in the city became crazy about the sudden fortune. They rushed and moved the valuable to their homes. At this time, someone went to the man's home with what they had got. They scolded, "You are a liar. Look! Everybody with eyes can see that there is only money and valuables from the sky, but you said a disaster would come. What do you mean? Do you mean to confuse peoples' minds and make trouble out of nothing?" Even his parents thought he was crazy, so they locked him in his room and would not allow him to go out.

Seeing that nobody trusted him and finding himself trapped, the man was very anxious. In his final moment of desperation he started to dig a tunnel leading to the outskirt of the city, preparing for the unexpected mishap. On the seventh day, the ferocious gale that the monk had mentioned came and it blew so hard that the city was darkened. When night came, with incredible thunder and lightning, the sandstorm poured down from the sky. All the roads and yards

of homes in the city were filled with sand and dirt. The sound of the thunder woke the man up. He immediately got up and then escaped the city from the tunnel in darkness. When the sandstorm finally ceased, the man was very surprised to see that the city was completely buried by the sand. Thus, the man had no way to go back home, so he went east all along until he arrived at Bimo City and settled down there.

To his great surprise, as soon as he arrived at Bimo City, he found that the sculpture of the Tathagata was already there so he continued to make offerings to the sculpture. He told the story about the sculpture as well as his personal experience to the people in this city. Consequently, people in this city, from maharaja to common people, became devout to the sculpture of the Tathagata and burned joss sticks to worship it.

Since then, Helaoluojia City became a barren sand hill. Sometimes, when a gale comes over, people could still see the walls and tops of buildings outlined on ground. All of those who wanted to make fortune began digging within the dunes to seek riches and fortunes, but no one had got what they were looking for. Whenever they started to dig for the money and valuable, there would be a sudden gale. The terrible wind together with the flying sand and stones would injure people. What's more, once the wind stopped, people would lose their sense of direction, and could not find out the location of the city anymore.

Translated by Lu Tong

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Glowing Pagoda

West Niche, Cave 237, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

West of the capital city of Khotan is a turbulent river called Xiyu. In the forest on its bank, there is an ornate shrine named after the Sajiayexian Temple, where a grand stupa can be found. The stupa is very impressive with its bottle-like body covered with golden and silver foil, as well as its golden bowl-like base. People are in awe of the stupa because it not only is always under the showering of golden rays in the daytime, but it also shines with starring rays in the evening. What's more, even far into the night, the stupa can send out dazzling rays of light. It is worshiped by local people as a supernatural stupa because of this.

Long, long ago, there were no shrines in Khotan, and therefore nobody worshiped the figure of Buddha. One day, an arhat came to the country and settled down in the forest. Sheltered by big trees and fed by the water from the river, he concentrated on cultivating himself according to Zen. But in the evening, without light, he found it hard to read and chant sutra. So he applied his supernatural power to convert golden rays to lighting.

One evening after dusk, the king in the palace felt depressed, so he led his ministers and maharajas to the West City Building for a walk to relax. By the time he was ready to return to the palace, he suddenly noticed the golden rays from the forest. The king was so curious about this that he asked the people around him, "What is that glowing in the forest?"

"Your Majesty, there is an arhat who came from afar sitting there in mediation. He generates golden rays to illuminate his chanting, and consequently he lights the forest as if it were daytime."

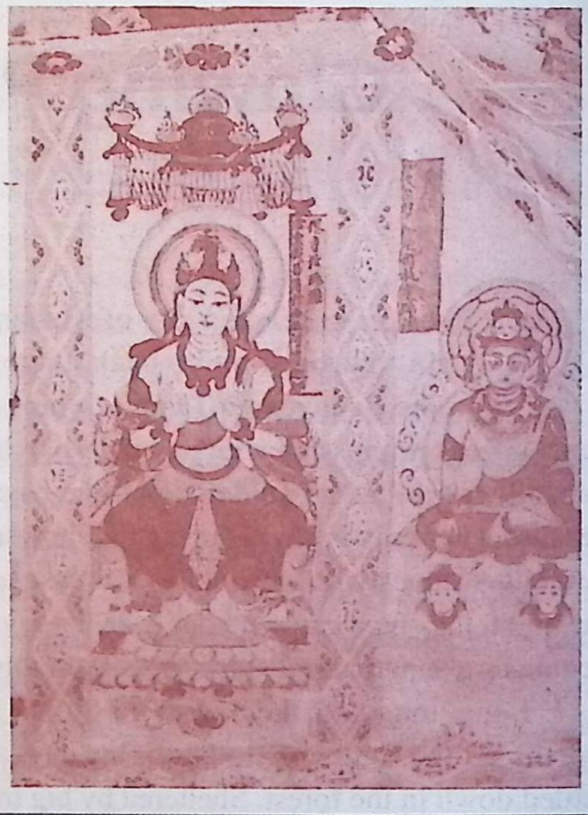
"It's a miracle. Why didn't you let me know earlier?" the king said angrily.

"We thought it was heathenism, so we didn't dare to disturb you," faltered one of the ministers.

"Take me there right away, I'd like to meet the arhat in person," the king

ordered.

Together with his followers the king went into the forest and found the right place where the arhat was chanting. As soon as he saw the man, the king could tell immediately that the arhat was uncommon judging from his appearance. He was someone who had a connection to Buddhism, so the king bowed down with respect and said honestly to him, "Dear shaman, would you like to follow me and leave this tough place? You are not sheltered and there isn't enough food here. I'd like to invite you to come and stay in my palace where I can take good care of you."



Hearing this, the arhat stood up and returned a bow to the king. "Thank you very much for your kindness, but I can't," he said. "Please allow me to explain the reason. Everybody knows that birds fly in the sky, fish find their home in water, wheat grows on dry land, and rice grows well in wet land. We cannot change this since this is the law of nature. The principle applies to human beings as well. Everybody has his or her own will and we can never force them to change that. This quiet forest is the best place for Buddhists to cultivate ourselves, while the noisy populated palace is not the right place for us."

Then, the arhat told the people a lot about the power of Buddha. He shared with them how the Buddha established Buddhism, how he benefited and educated all flesh. Upon hearing this, the king felt his mind was suddenly enlightened. Then he said regretfully, "Oh, how wise the Buddha is! It is a shame that I had no idea of it at all before and I even believed in heathenism.

How foolish I am!"

"Please don't blame yourself. It is not your fault when you were not informed. That's why I came here with the assignment of letting more people know of the power of Buddha. As long as you become a Buddhist, the Buddha will forgive you."

After the conversation with the arhat, the king learned a lot about Buddhism. As soon as he returned to his palace, he ordered all the people in the country to change their religious belief to Buddhism. What's more, he gathered craftsmen from all over the country to build a grand temple with an aerial stupa in it,that was later named the Sajiayexian Temple. When the project was completed, he invited the arhat to move into the temple, and conferred him as the abbot. Since then, many monks gathered there to study the Tripitaka Dharma-wheel. Everyday the temple was filled with the sound of sutra-chanting. The king often came to the shrine to attend the arhat's lectures about Buddhism. "The edification from the Buddha has helped me understand the truth and become enlightened. This exciting feeling is like that of a long-time thirsty seedling meet with sweet dew," he said.

The king's loyalty and his firm belief in Buddhism moved the Buddha. He consequently assigned Bodhisattva to send him hundreds of Buddhist relics. This made the king very happy, so he ordered people all over the country to celebrate the significant event for three days. However, next came the question of where to put the relics and how to honor them? So the king consulted with

the arhat for guidance. The arhat said, "According to the custom, the Buddhist relics shall be placed under stupa," replied the arhat. Hearing this, the king was in a dilemma. He sighed over this, "Oh, it's too late. The stupa has been built already. How can we put them under the stupa?"

"Don't worry. Please make five boxes of gold, silver, copper, iron and stone respectively to hold the Buddhist relics. I will see to it that they are placed under the stupa myself."

So the king commanded the craftsmen to make the boxes as required immediately. Three days later, all the delicate boxes were made ready and filled with the relics. Then, the king convoyed the valuable wagons with the boxes to the temple, followed by his ministers and maharajas. Thousands of people came and crowded around the temple to watch.

The arhat asked his disciples to take the boxes off the wagon. Then he came to the front of the stupa and started to exert his super power. He lifted up the stupa by his right hand very easily with no sign of strain. Watching this, all the people present including the king and his men were shocked since it was as if he was not lifting a heavy stupa but a single root from a tree. At that very moment, the king and his followers were so shocked by the miracle that they stood motionlessly with their eyes fixated on the uplifted stupa.

"Come, please dig the holes in which to place the boxes," said the arhat. The king awoke and came to his normal state. He asked his men to dig holes under the stupa at once. When the holes were ready, the boxes were placed in them in the sequence of gold, silver, copper, iron and stone. As soon as they finished, the arhat set down the stupa safely without any damage or slanting. Seeing this, people started to applaud and shout cheers. The sound was so loud that it shook the ground. From then on, people in that country showed more respect to Buddhism.

From the story it is evident that the stupa sends golden rays because of the Buddhist relics that lay underneath.

Translated by Lu Tong

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The Mysterious Agni Water-fire Pool

Cave 237, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Nepal is a country located to the south of the Himalayas. The friendship between China and Nepal can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. For this reason, it is not surprising that there's a painting about the story of the water-fire pool of Nepal in the Mogao Grottoes.

According to the records of sutras and relevant historical documents, there was a very famous water-fire pool within Nepal's territory. People considered it a natural wonder because the pool always kept the same amount of water despite drought or excessive rain. The water in the pool burned like oil instead of water. Once on fire, only sand could put the flames out. Even then, the sand burned into a fine dust.

A long time ago in Nepal there was a very curious king. He was quite eager to discover the mystery about the water-fire pool. One day the king assigned a general who led 500 warriors to the pool to explore the water with long poles. The poles eventually struck something hard at the bottom of the pool. The general became quite excited, and ordered his men to dive into the water to find out more. Half an hour later, a diver appeared at the surface of the water. He said he had touched an iron cabinet at the bottom of the pool. Hearing this, the general decided to get the cabinet out of water. He asked the warrior to dive again into the water in order to attach some ropes to the cabinet.

After that, with the order given by the general, and with the great joint effort of the 500 warriors, the cabinet was finally dragged to the surface of the water. It was approximately one meter wide and locked with a big shining copper lock. The general was so excited that he started to shout, "Hurry up! Drag the cabinet to the bank!"

Just at this very moment, a sudden and horrible earsplitting sound rang. This caused the tied ropes to simultaneously break off. All the warriors who had helped drag the cabinet fell to the ground unconsciously.

Despite this, the general was still determined to complete his task.

"We will not go back until we have succeeded," he said.

So again, the general asked someone to dive into the water for a third time. As soon as the diver had bundled up the cabinet, all the warriors on the bank started to drag it with the greatest possible efforts. Unfortunately, they continued to fail time and time again. The general subsequently went to the nearby village to gather more people for help. Yet unexpectedly, even with the combined efforts of more people, the cabinet remained at the bottom of the pool motionless. It seemed unmovable. No matter how many people came and how hard they had worked it was impossible to pull the cabinet out.

The sun then set. The general and his warriors were so tired that they fell asleep by the pool. In their dreams they heard a friendly voice from some supernatural being, "Dear men, I understand that you have toiled all day to drag a cabinet out of the pool in order to satisfy the king's curiosity. Now I would like to reveal the secret of the water-fire pool. When you go back, let the king know what I tell you today."

"There is a golden cabinet inside the iron one in water-fire pool. It holds the golden crown of the Bodhisattva Maitreya. It is safeguarded by eight firedrakes. The fire in the water is from the mouth of the firedrakes. It is impossible for mortals to pull the crown out. I advise you to cease what you are doing and go back home at once. Anyone who doesn't follow this will be courting death."

The next morning, the soldiers were so terrified that no one wanted to do the job any more. The general was no exception. He ordered the troops to withdraw. As soon as they arrived at the capital, he reported to the king what had happened. Learning the secret of the water-fire pool, the king no longer dared to offend the Buddha. He led the ministers and maharaja to the pool to devotedly worship the Buddha, and gave an order to people to protect the pool. In truth, historical records show that this pool is a natural gas pool. It was considered a mystery at that time because people didn't know any better.

Translated by Lu Tong

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Prince Kalyanakarin Sought Treasure from the Sea

South Wall, Cave 238, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

A long time ago, there was a king named Bao Kai. He was wise in governing his kingdom and very kind to his subjects. He controlled over 500 small kingdoms and had 500 concubines. However, they had not bore him a son, and he was extremely worried. He went to the nearest forest to visit the two immortals and prayed for granting him a son. Observing his eager desire, the immortals promised to help.

Not long after, his wish came true. The first consort gave birth to a son. After the Brahman diviners read the son's facial features, they named him "Well-doer" (Kalyanakarin). At the same time, the second consort bore him another son, and after the diviners read the son's face they named him "Evil-doer" (Papakarin). Time passed and the two sons grew up.

Kalyanakarin was intelligent and kind-hearted. He was willing to give alms. Therefore, the king loved him very much. One day, Kalyanakarin rode the little elephant decorated with gold, silver and jewels out of the palace.

He enjoyed very much the beautiful sceneries in the outskirts, looking at the trees, cows, sheep and all the spring water trickling from the mountains. Suddenly, he saw a beggar who was thin as a lath begging for food, a butcher who was ugly and ferocious, killing cows; the peasants, who dripped with sweat ploughing the fields, the women who were fatigued weaving cotton, the hunters who were very excited killing animals, fisherman were busy netting the fish, the birds and beasts were slaughtering each other. Kalyanakarin saw all of these things and felt very sad and sympathetic. He did not understand what he had seen since he was cooped inside the palace all day long. And his attendants explained to him that the people lived on food. In order to get food, they had to

plow the land and grow crops. The birds and beasts had to kill each other in order to survive. This had been so from the creation of the world.

Kalyanakarin felt greatly grieved on hearing the explanation, so he told his attendants to take him home. After that, all the scenes he saw in the country-side lingered in his mind. He decided to stop living beings from committing sins and to stop peoples' suffering.

Kalyanakarin told his father everything he had seen on his way that day and how he wanted to give all the gold, silver and jewels in the royal treasury to the people all over the country. The king agreed and promised to open the treasure storehouse. Lots of gold, silver, grains, clothes and other treasures were displayed on the streets and people took what they needed.

News traveled fast and all the people came. Before long, the storehouse

was nearly empty. The ministers were worried about this and gathered to talk about it. They went to the royal palace to reprimand the king for allowing the prince to use a great portion of the treasures. The country was in great danger if the prince continued his actions. However, the king replied, "He is the crown prince and what he does takes special consideration for the people, so do not hurt his feeling. Of course you may keep him from doing that but prevent him by delaying him."

So when Kalyanakarin wanted to take more treasures, the minister in charge would act deliberately absent.

The attendants he sent for the treasures went back with empty hands several times. "This is strange," Kalyanakarin thought to himself.

Kalyanakarin was very clever and soon guessed the reason of it. He thought that this was what the king had told them to do. "A thoughtful son should not depend on his father all the time and should not use up all the treasures his father has." Kalyanakarin thought, "I should look for treasures myself. I should try what I can to protect his people against cold, hunger, and sufferings.

Kalyanakarin called the ministers together to discuss how they could get the most treasures. They put out different suggestions. Farming, doing business and raising cattle were the main topics. One knowledgeable minister suggested, "Since the prince wants to find treasures, I know that there are countless treasures in the sea, and among them there is an almighty pearl called Brahamamani. It can give you whatever you want. If we could get that pearl, we could get inexhaustible treasures." Prince Kalyanakarin was very excited by this suggestion and went to see his father, "I am going to the sea for treasures, and alms giving to the people. Please give me permission to leave."

His parents were surprised by their son's request and the king said immediately, "Why should you bother about going to seek treasures yourself? You could take all the treasures and give them to the people in order to satisfy your wish. All the treasures are yours. If you go to the sea, how could you bear the hunger and thirst? Besides, there are great perils and hardships, terrifying billows and whirlpools. There are whales and monsters, demons and ghosts. Many people went there but few returned. We will all worry about you if you go to the sea. Forget it. Do not mention it again. I will not allow you to go!"

But the prince was determined to deliver the toiling masses from the abyss of misery. Nothing could shake the iron will of the prince. He begged the king many times, but in vain. He prostrated himself on the ground and swore not to stand up if the king did not give him the consent.

The king, the queen and all the ministers tried to persuade him to stand up and promised to think it over at a later time, but the prince would not give up until he reached his goal.

One day passed, then two...until the seventh day, the prince was still lying on the ground without having a grain of food or a drop of water. He almost lost his consciousness. Fearing that the prince might starve to death, the queen helped him up on his knees and begged him to eat and drink something first, but the prince only replied, "I would rather die if you don't promise me."

The queen begged the king to let him go to the sea, otherwise he would die. "I beg Your Majesty to have some compassion for him. There is a tiny bit of hope for him to return alive if we let him have a try."

The king was very much moved by the determination of the prince. He nodded his agreement.

Kalyanakarin got permission and began to eat and drink. Soon he regained his health and was ready to start his journey. When his people learned the news, they were greatly encouraged. At that time, there was a famous navigator who had a lot of experience on the sea and was familiar with the sea routes and crucial land points, but he was already in his eighties and was blind in both eyes. Still the king invited him and he agreed to serve as the prince's guide.

Papakarin thought that if his brother found the treasures, his father would love him all the more and things would be more unfavorable to him. He told the king that he would accompany his brother. The king agreed to let him go and told him to help his brother when in danger. But Papakarin thought that he would kill his brother on the journey if he had the opportunity.

Led by Prince Kalyanakarin, Papakarin and the 500 men arrived at the seaside and they set sail. They had a safe and smooth voyage and arrived safely at the Treasure Island. They were all wild with joy when they saw, with their own eyes, all sorts of treasures. Kalyanakarin repeatedly told the men to make

full use of their time to collect the jewels. These treasures were very precious and could not be found in their country. He urged them again and again not to collect too much otherwise the boats would be overloaded and turned over or sunk by the weight. As soon as he arranged them well, together with the guide, they went to the deep sea in search of the talismanic pearl.

The small boat zigzagged through submerged rocks and finally they reached the gold sand beach. The old man could not move any farther. He told the prince, "I am dying. Listen, follow my directions. Keep going forward and you will find a castle. When you go inside the castle, 500 angels will present the pearls to you. Among them, the most beautiful angel will present a black pearl named the Brahma-mani pearl to you. Receive the Brahma-mani first and then receive the rest. Remember, do not say a single word inside or outside the castle."

With those words the old man closed his eyes and died. Kalyanakarin cried bitterly over his death. Then he buried the old man with the gold sand and continued on.

Kalyanakarin walked on and on and to his surprise, a Seven-Gem Castle was standing before him. The castle gate opened miraculously and 500 angels presented the pearls to him and one of them, the most beautiful one, had the black pearl. The prince received the black pearl and the rest. He left the Seven-Gem Castle without saying a word.

Kalyanakarin returned to the Treasure Island. He thought that all the men including his brother had already sailed back home, so he started sailing back at once. He sailed for several days and suddenly saw a man floating in the sea with a piece of wood. When he drew nearer, he recognized that the poor man was his own brother, Papakarin. He quickly dragged his brother aboard and asked him what had happened. "Those people are pretty greedy. They collected too many treasures. On our way home we met a large storm," he cried. "The boats capsized and all the 500 men drowned. The jewels sunk into the deep sea. Fortunately, I survived by floating on a piece of wood."

Kalyanakarin was an honest young man, so he told his brother the truth. "Forget about those treasures. I have the Brahuma-mani, the treasure that is inexhaustible."

"Where is it? Let me have a look," asked Papakarin eagerly. Kalyanakarin took it out from his clothes. Papakarin's eyes turned red when he saw the pearl. He thought Father King would love him all the time. Now that he had the precious pearl, Father King would definitely love him more. " I must kill him, take the pearl, and present it to the king," he said to himself. He pretended to be very happy and promised to take turns looking after it when they went to sleep. They decided that when one was asleep, the other would look after it.

One day, when Kalyanakarin was asleep, Parakarin was in charge of the pearl. He picked two sharp branch sticks and jabbed his brother's eyes with them. Then he fled with the pearl. Prince Kalyanakarin felt a piercing pain in his eyes and cried loudly for his brother, but received no answer. The kind-hearted deity of trees told the prince, "Stop shouting. It was your own brother who made you blind and who was the real robber." The prince was shocked when he learned the truth and fainted.

Papakarin ran all the way home with the Brahma-mani. He pretended to be very sad before his parents and told them with tears, "We met a big storm and all the boats capsized, so my brother and all the others drowned. Luckily, I survived." The queen fainted when she heard the news. The king scolded Papakarin angrily, "It is a shame that you had the face to come back. I told you to help your brother when he was in danger but why didn't you do so?"

Papakarin did not have a response for his father. However, he hid the Brahma-mani underground and did not mention it to anybody.

The morning after Prince Kalyankarin fainted, a herdsman with 500 grazing cows came towards the prince. When the lead cow saw the prince, it licked him gently. The herdsman immediately pulled the sticks out of his eyes and carried him back home. The prince was fed with good food and his health improved but he was blind.

One day, the prince thought that he could not stay any longer and he asked the herdsman for permission to leave for another place. The prince also asked the herdsman to get him a zither and bring him to the busiest part of the capital city of the country. The herdsman was very kind and bought a zither for him.

As Prince Kalyanakarin was an expert in playing the musical instrument,

people enjoyed listening to the beautiful music. Thus he had plenty to eat and more than enough to wear.

The king of his kingdom had a very large orchard at that time. When the fruit was ripe, the parrots would come and help themselves. One day, when the orchard keeper went shopping, he heard the beautiful music and felt sympathetic with the poor beggar, so he asked him to help watch the fruit garden.

"I am blind . How can I drive the birds away?" the prince asked.

"I'll hang some bells on the trees. When you hear the chirping and twittering of the birds, pull the rope and they will fly away," the keeper told him. The prince accepted and began the job the following day.

Before he had gone to the sea for the treasure, Prince Kalyanakarin had previously fed a wild, white goose. The king wrote a letter and tied it to the goose hoping it could find the prince. The goose flew over the sea, and then it soared over the land and finally found Prince Kalyanakarin in the kingdom of Risva, playing a zither. The prince knew from the letter that his parents were heartbroken, so he immediately wrote a letter back and told them the whole story. The king and the queen were overjoyed to learn that their son was still alive.

Prince Kalyanakarin was at peace playing the zither as usual in the orchard. One day, the beautiful daughter of the king came to play in the garden and heard the music. She came up and was surprised that in front of her was a blind young man. The princess felt a very strong sympathy for him. She sat beside the blind man and listened. From the informal chatting, she judged that he was a kind and knowledgeable person.

The sound of music drew the two youths together. She sat beside him listening and was reluctant to go away.

After that, she would come every day and shared her meals with the young blind man. She knew she had fallen in love with him. One day, she did not go back to the palace until midnight and the king sent a maid to fetch her, but she refused to go back and told the king the next morning that she would gladly marry the blind young man.

The king was greatly surprised and annoyed. He scolded his daughter, "How could you, a princess, marry yourself to a blind beggar? Don't you know

that you have been engaged to the crown prince of Varanasi? He has gone to the sea for treasures and hasn't come back yet. Won't you feel disgraced if you marry a blind beggar?"

Still, the king clearly understood her personality. She meant what she said. Therefore, they got married secretly and moved into the palace.

The princess did not have the habit of informing her husband before going out of the palace. Many times, she returned late. Prince Kalyanakarin became very angry. "You leave the palace early and come back late everyday. What is happening? Since you dare not tell me, I bet you have unfaithful intentions toward me."

"No, no. You're wrong. I am your devoted wife," replied the princess.

"How can you prove that?"

She took an oath, "If I have done any unfaithful activity outside, let your eyes be blind forever, but let one of your eyes see if I am innocent!"

She had hardly finished her oath when one of his eyes was able to see the light again. Both of them were overjoyed.

The princess asked, "We have been married for several months, but you've never told me your life experiences. Where are you from? And where are your parents?"

"I am the crown prince of Varanasi, Kalyanakarin."

"You must be joking. You are telling me a lie. Prince Kalyanakarin has gone to the sea and has not come back yet. How could you pretend to be him?"

Then the prince told his wife how they had gone to the sea to seek the treasures and the story about his brother. The prince emphasized that he would not punish his brother and had already forgiven him.

"Forgive him? He wanted to kill you. You are deceiving me. I don't believe you."

"If I have told a lie and deceived you," the prince swore, "let my other eye be blind forever, but if I have told you the truth, let my other eye see the light again."

The miracle happened again. No sooner had he finished his words then his other eye became bright. Seeing that her husband was strong and handsome,

the princess jumped for joy and ran to tell her father the news.

The king, together with the princess, quickly went to see Prince Kalyanakarin. He was surprised when he saw the prince. Yes, it was Prince Kalyanakarin. The king kneeled on the ground and confessed, "Forgive my sins. I really didn't know your status." The king asked the general to drive the carriage and sent him to the border secretly proclaiming that Prince Kalyanakarin was back safely from the sea. Then he led the ministers, guards of hour, and the teams of horses and carriages standing on both sides of the road to formally receive the return of Prince Kalyanakarin in triumph. The king declaimed on the spot that the princess and the prince were holding a wedding ceremony."

The goose, with the letter the prince wrote, went back to Varanasi. The king and the queen were greatly relieved when they learned that their son was still alive. Meanwhile, they were more enraged at what Papakarin had done, and put him in prison.

The king and the queen were overjoyed to learn that the prince had married the princess of Risva. The letter was sent to the kingdom of Risva to welcome the prince and princess back home. Before they left for home, Prince Kalyanakarin asked the king to present some gifts to the herdsman who had saved and helped him when he was in dire peril.

Immediately the herdsman was called and was showered with lots of treasures in return for his kindness. The herdsman was pleasantly surprised and from that time on, he was lifted out of poverty.

Before long, the young couple, accompanied by the king and the ministers of the kingdom of Risva, rode home on white elephants.

The king and the queen were extremely happy to learn of their son's approaching and went out to receive the couple.

They greeted the old king and the queen on their knees, and the prince asked his father where his brother Papakarin was.

"Don't mention him. An evil person like him should be imprisoned and never set free!" the king said.

"Father King, would you be kind to set him free and ask him to come to me?" begged the prince.

The king gave in and Parakarin was brought before his brother.

Kalyanakarin felt pity for him and asked Papakarin, "Where is the Brahma-mani?"

The magnanimity and benevolence of his brother had deeply touched him "I buried it under the ground," he told the prince. They went to the secret place and found the treasure.

The prince chose a lucky day. He bathed himself, burnt joss sticks, put the Brahma-mani on the incense table, and swore in all directions, "I have suffered greatly in order to save all the living beings from the sea of misery. Now I have got the almighty pearl, so let it bless all humanity with happiness!"

When he finished his words, a gust of clear wind came suddenly from the east. It scattered the clouds and mists in the sky and blew off all the dirt on the land. The sky was now clear and bright. The land was clean and fresh. Then, miracles happened. All of a sudden, rice and other kinds of rich foods rained down from the heaven.Then, colorful and beautiful clothes and adornments fell down, followed by silver and gold together with musical instruments. All that people wanted rained down. Since then, the people have been living happy and peaceful lives.

81

East Maharaja and Queen Mother of the West

North Ceiling, Cave 249, Western Wei Dynasty, 536-556

East Maharaja was the fifth emperor of the Western Zhou Dynasty, also known as Emperor Zhou Mu. He became a mythical character in Chinese history.

Queen Mother of the West was the renowned goddess among the people of China. Because she possessed immortal peach medicine, people called her the Goddess of Long Life.

For thousands of years the story of East Maharaja meeting with Queen Mother of the West has been passed down from generation to generation. The frescoes of this story were also painted in the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang.

Emperor Zhou Mu was a handsome young emperor. One day he heard that there was a kingdom in the west named Kingdom of Queen Mother of the West and it was a land where many fairies lived. The emperor decided to visit Queen Mother of the West. He ventured west with his closest minister in a coach drawn by eight horses. The coach was driven by Zaofu and the powerful Wuhuo walking ahead of it to clear the way.

On their way to the west, the chief of the tribes treated Emperor Zhou Mu warmly and offered him livestock and food as gifts. Emperor Zhou Mu also offered him some precious silk as gift.

Many days and months passed. Then one afternoon, the troops stopped at a river and decided to lodge their tents there. Emperor Zhou Mu walked out of his tent and looked to the west and saw a high mountain cutting into the sky. He didn't know the mountain's name, so he found a local person to ask. An old man said, "The mountain is Sky Mountain and the Kingdom of Queen Mother

of the West is located at the top."

On hearing this, Emperor Zhou Mu became very happy and awarded the old man lots of money. He then returned to his tent and ordered servants to prepare dinner and celebrations. His senior minister Xing Yumi was doubtful and asked him,

"Your Majesty, why are you so happy? Why are we having a party?"

"Dear minister", the emperor replied, "The kingdom of Queen Mother of the West that I have been longing to visit is ahead of us. That's why we are having a party!"

On hearing that, the minister's face turned pale and was shocked by his words. He stammered, "Your Majesty, you should not go to that country! Even the small children know about the Kingdom of Queen Mother of the West. The queen of that country has a human face but tiger teeth and snake legs and a leopard's tail. She wears beast skin and eats raw meat. So for your safety..."

Emperor Zhou Mu interrupted and said, "Those are jokes to terrify the children. I don't believe them. Once we visit her, we will know whether Queen Mother of the West is a ghost or a human being. The idea of visiting Queen Mother of the West has been in my heart for a long time. I heard that she has immortal medicine which can make people live forever."

The minister shook his head and said, "That's impossible!"

"Do you forget that after Houyi (a Chinese legendary hero who shot down nine suns) received the immortal medicine from the Queen Mother of the West, and how his wife, Chang'e ate it secretly and then went to the moon to lead an immortal life?"

The minister paused and smiled, "Ok, I hope Your Majesty gets this medicine and has an immortal life and will be our emperor forever!"

The minister then raised his cup and toasted Emperor Zhou Mu. The emperor was very happy and drank a lot and slept soundly until late the next morning.

Though the mountains where the Queen Mother of the West lived were standing before them, the emperor and his ministers still had to walk for four days before they reached the kingdom itself.

On the third day, after the red sun had set behind the mountains, the emperor and his entourage arrived at the foot of the mountains. The local people told them that they had arrived at the kingdom of Queen Mother of the West. After they climbed one more mountain, they could see the palace of Queen Mother of the West. Emperor Zhou Mu was excited and asked his followers to take a rest so that they could be in high spirits when they met Queen Mother of the West.

On the fourth day, they got up early and after they had their breakfast, they set off on their way. After two hours of walking, they came to the foot of the main hill. Though the hilly road twisted and turned a lot, it was fairly broad and easy for the coach to pass through. By the time they had climbed to the top of the hill, it was already noon. Emperor Zhou Mu looked up and saw that there were numerous palaces deep in the clouds. Those must be the palaces of Queen Mother of the West, he thought to himself.

Emperor Zhou Mu ordered his servant to bring out four golden plates and put pearls, agates, ambers and corals on them. He then asked Minister Xing Yumi to take four people to hold the plates, and go to meet with Queen Mother of the West first.

After the messengers had gone, Emperor Zhou Mu ordered his soldiers to tidy their clothes and march ahead with the music troops in the front rank followed by the guards of honor while the emperor walked within the middle of the troops.

Ahead of them, the road became broader with tall pines reaching the sky along its edges. They could see rare flowers and grass everywhere and smell the sweetness of the air. There were also numerous resplendent and magnificent golden palaces. While they were enjoying the marvelous scenery, a thunderous crash scared the people. Then a large gate opened in front of them. Many people playing music for Emperor Zhou exited the gate. Dancing girls in colorful clothes were also lined up to welcome him. The emperor waved his hand to the girls. Just as he was walking ahead, he heard another musical sound and the gate of the palace also opened in front of him. From the gate emerged a young lady who wore beautiful jewelry. Behind her, there were many young girls in colorful clothes. Emperor Zhou Mu opened his eyes widely at the sight of this

young and beautiful lady. She was gorgeous and very graceful. The emperor knew that it was Queen Mother of the West who had come to welcome him in person. He hurriedly went to salute to her. When their eyes met, they were like flames burning. After they introduced themselves, they entered the gate of the palace hand in hand. The music played and many officials knelt down on both sides, including Minister Xing. They came to the main palace, which was inlaid with jade and looked quite magnificent. Entering the palace, Emperor Zhou Mu and Queen Mother of the West sat down with their officials beside them. Many beautiful ladies-in-waiting brought them tea and dim sum.

Then Emperor Zhou Mu asked his maids to bring 100 pieces of silk and gave them to Queen Mother of the West as a gift.

Though Queen Mother of the West was the queen of the country, she had never seen any silk that beautiful. She put the silk on herself and praised it, "The silk is as beautiful as the clouds in the sky."

The queen then brought out local crystal, beautiful jades and rare jewel and presented them to Emperor Zhou Mu as gifts.

After night set, all the colored glaze lights in the palace were lit and the feast began. Queen Mother of the West said zealously, "Your Majesty came from thousands of miles away. To welcome you, my distinguished guest, I've prepared some wine and local delicacies. Please help yourself."

The dozens of beautiful girls brought out wine and dishes. All the dinnerware was made of jade, something the guests had never seen before. The wine that was poured into the jade cups soon turned to red from green with an exquisite fragrance that permeated the air. No matter how much anyone drank, they never got drunk. Queen Mother of the West raised her cup from time to time to toast Emperor Zhou Mu. Beautiful music soon started. Sometimes it was like drifting clouds in the sky, sometimes it was like a violent storm, sometimes it was like a herd of roaring horses and sometimes it was lively and full of joy. The poetic grace and dancing of the girls cheered the audience and the dinner lasted until late in the night. The guests were arranged to stay in the palace of Jade Pond.

Later the next morning after Emperor Zhou Mu got up and had breakfast, Queen Mother of the West came and invited him to tour around the Jade Pond.

They set off and their officials followed them to climb the hill behind the palace that had a view of Jade Pond. Mountains encircled the pond and the water in the pond was so green that it made the whole pond looked like a huge piece of jade shining under the sun. A breeze ruffled the surface of the pond. The snow mountains, white clouds and the green pines reflected on the surface of the pond. Looking at the beautiful scenery, Emperor Zhou Mu fell into a reverie. Suddenly dozens of white clouds wafted onto the mountains and covered them. Everyone felt as if they were in heaven. On their way back, Queen Mother of the West explained her country to the guests. She said that in this country women were in power and all the children followed their mother's family name. The throne was passed from one generation to the next smoothly and there was no change of dynasty. The ways of this country were simple and honesty prevailed throughout the society. People all faithfully followed all the laws of the land. The words of Queen Mother of the West filled Emperor Zhou Mu with admiration.

Some time later, Queen Mother of the West accompanied Emperor Zhou Mu to the Temple of Queen Mother of the West. Queen Mother of the West said, "Your Majesty, this is my ancestral hall. Would you like to leave your inscription?"

Emperor Zhou Mu accepted her suggestion and wrote "The Mountain of Queen Mother of the West" on a flat stone in the temple and then asked his craftsman to chisel the words on the stone. Queen Mother of the West was very happy and said with tenderness,"Your Majesty came to the Jade Pond and made the mountains and lakes more magnificent than ever before. Why don't you plant a locust tree to celebrate our meeting?"

Emperor Zhou Mu then left the temple and planted five locust trees.

Under the care of Queen Mother of the West, Emperor Zhou Mu had a wonderful time. They ate and spent many hours together, and slowly Emperor Zhou Mu found himself falling in love with Queen Mother of the West. He eventually forgot to return to his country. Realizing this, Minister Xing became rather worried, and kindly persuaded Emperor Zhou Mu to prepare to return home. Emperor Zhou Mu decided to set off at once.

Queen Mother of the West knew that she couldn't make Emperor Zhou

Mu stay longer so she held a grand farewell party for him. At the party, she played the lyre and sang a song for the guests:

"Music played at the lofty Jade Pond,
The guests were drunk and the songs flowed,
Flowed to the highest state,
To the highest state as your long life we prayed,
For your life is long, but when is your next return?"

In order to thank Queen Mother of the West and express his sense of loss at returning, Emperor Zhou Mu wrote a poem for her:

"At the Jade Pond I met Queen Mother of the West,
Dancing and songs were presented to the honorable guests.
Dancing and songs put the guests at ease,
The guests were at ease and could do nothing else,
But to fill the wine again into the goblets,
Let's drink the wine together under the crescent moon."

Early the next morning, Queen Mother of the West said farewell to Emperor Zhou Mu on the foot of the Sky Mountain. Saying goodbye to each other, the hostess and the guests wept bitter tears.

It was said that though Queen Mother of the West and Emperor Zhou Mu never married when they were in throne, they became a couple later when they both became immortals.

Emperor Zhou Mu's portrait was painted on the north ceiling of Cave 249 during Western Wei Dynasty (535-556), opposite the portrait of Queen Mother of the West. In the fresco, a dragon wagon was painted at the center and Emperor Zhou Mu is sitting on the wagon with his arms crossed in front of him. The driver of the wagon— Zaofu— is standing beside him and in front of the wagon Wuhuo is beating the drum to clear the way. Yuren and Feilian are standing on the colorful clouds to follow them and beautiful cranes are flying overhead in the sky. Flowers and colorful clouds are flying upwards.

The portrait of Queen Mother of the West was painted on the south ceiling of the cave opposite that of Emperor Zhou Mu, indicating that they were a couple. At the center of the fresco, we can see that Queen Mother of the West wears Chinese traditional clothes and stands on a wagon that is drawn by four phoenixes. A beautiful canopy covers the wagon and banners are seen waving behind the wagon. In front of the wagon, Wuhuo, Yuren, and Xianren wave banners to clear the way. Beautiful flowers and colorful clouds are flying in the sky. The whole fresco reveals a wonderful scene from the story of fairies.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

82

The Colossus, Asural Holding the Sun and the Moon

West Ceiling, Cave 249, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Long ago, there was an old couple who lived by the sea and made their living by fishing. They were a kindhearted couple and shared everything they had with the poor. They lived a contented life except for one thing: they had no children. By now they had both past their 50s and worried that they would never have a child. In vain, the woman burned incense and prayed daily for a son or a daughter.

One summer morning, the woman sat by the seashore mending a net while her husband went fishing.

By midday it was unbearably hot and sultry so the woman decided to go for a swim in the sea. The further out she swam, the cooler and more refreshing the water became. The woman was reluctant to return to the hot beach and lingered happily in the invigorating sea. Suddenly, she felt something enter her body but she felt no pain or discomfort and dismissed it as her imagination. Later as she walked home from the beach she was sure that there really was something in her belly. Frightened, she told her husband what had happened.

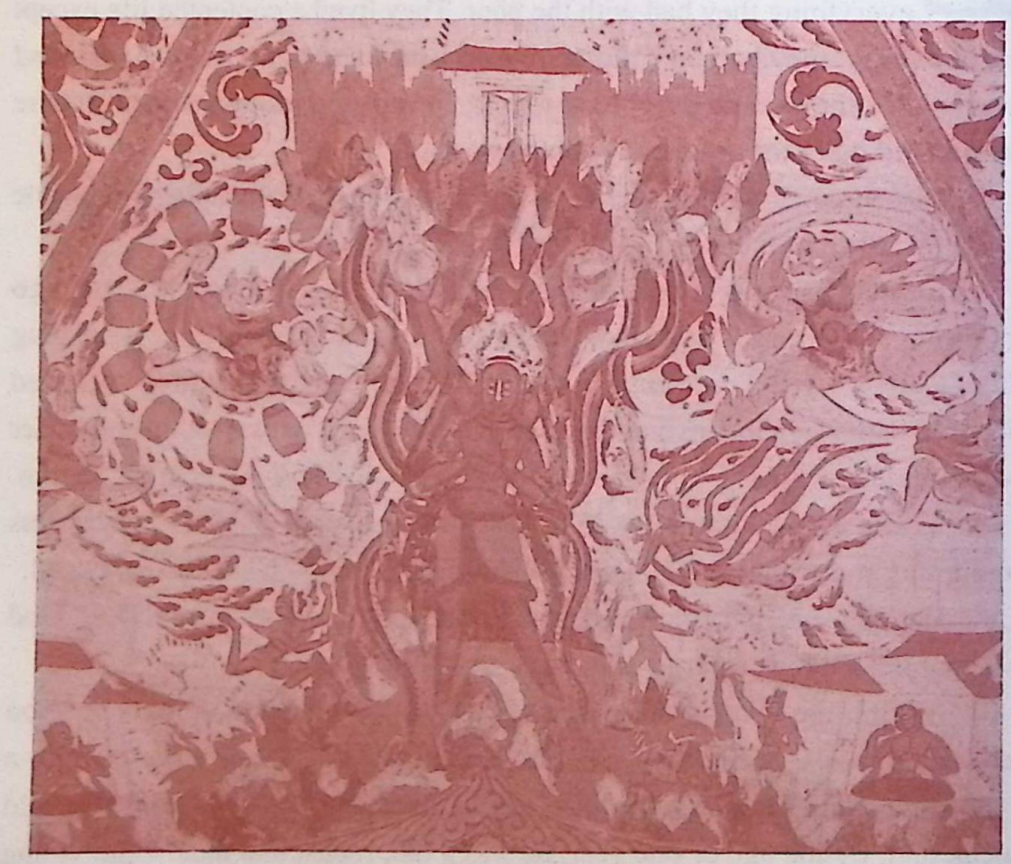
Her husband, not frightened at all by her story, became very excited, "God has manifested his power and sent us a child," he exclaimed.

At first the woman dismissed her husband's explanation, but she soon realized that she really was pregnant, and 99 days later she gave birth to a handsome son. This was no ordinary child. Three days after his birth he could speak and, by the age of one year, he was a tall, robust and handsome young

lad. His parents named him Asura, the Giant.

One day there was a heavy storm at sea and Asura's father drowned. The widowed mother and her son were reduced to a hard life of poverty, but Asura was a loving son who served his mother hand and foot and on many occasions went hungry so that she could eat well. For their livelihood they depended on whatever firewood the boy collected. Everyday Asura went up the mountain to cut firewood and carried it on his shoulders down to the market to sell.

One year, heavy rains in the mountains sent torrents of water streaming down the slopes. Everything was flooded and the people could not grow and market their crops. The locals were too poor to buy firewood from Asura, but he managed to exchange his firewood for two corn cakes.



Just as Asura and his mother were about to sit down to their meager supper of two corn cakes, there was a knock on their door. Outside was a weather-beaten monk who was stick thin and wore shabby, torn clothes.

"Alms-giver," said the monk in a weak voice, "I have eaten nothing for three days. Take pity on me and give me some food."

Asura was very sympathetic and without a second thought he gave the monk his own corn cake. The monk grabbed the corn cake and wolfed it down in seconds.

"I know you are both kind, generous people," said the monk. "Can I have another corn cake?"

Indeed, Asura's aged mother was a kind woman, so without hesitation she, too, gave her corn cake to the monk.

The monk ate the corn cake, offered a thousand thanks for their hospitality and left.

The next day, Asura went up the mountain to cut firewood as usual. Once again he was able to exchange his firewood in the village for two corn cakes. Pleased, he carried the two corn cakes home. When he entered the house, he was surprised to find the monk sitting there chatting with his mother.

"Welcome to our home," said Asura with a smile. "We have only these two cakes to eat. I can offer you one, the other is for my mother."

"Oh no," said the monk. "Since you offer to feed me today, you must at least give me enough food. One cake is not sufficient. I want them both."

"My son, give the two cakes to the master," said the old woman. "The disciples of Buddha have been our friends for generations and we are honored whenever the master comes to our humble home," she said graciously.

And so the monk ate both corn cakes and then departed.

On the third day the same thing happened. This time, when the monk finished eating the corn cakes, he asked them two questions.

"Why," he asked, "do you not resent me for eating all the cakes while you have gone hungry for three days?"

"Because we are friends to the members of Buddha's family," the old

woman answered.

"What if I lived in your house forever? Would you supply me with enough food every day?" The monk inquired.

"Easily," said Asura without hesitation. "I would go without to ensure that you had enough food to eat."

"Truly, you are the kindest of people," praised the monk. "Your hearts are clear and as compassionate as the Buddha's. I wish to give you something as a token of my gratitude. What would you like? Gold? Silver? A fancy new house, perhaps? Just ask and it is yours."

"With all due respect, Master," said Asura, "I want none of those things. My only desire is to be big and strong with long, muscular arms and legs. Our existence depends on obtaining firewood and if I had the strength and stature of a titan, I could cut and carry all the firewood we needed. If I had long muscular legs," Asura continued with tears in his eyes, "the vast distances I must walk to find the firewood wouldn't seem so far."

"So be it," said the monk, who was actually a deity in disguise. He took a mouthful of water and sprayed it on Asura's face. Next he placed his staff on the ground and commanded, "Change!" and the staff magically transformed into a wooden box. The monk then stood upon the box and as he bid them farewell, he ascended into the heavens.

As soon as the monk disappeared, Asura's joints began to pop and crack and his body grew bigger. In two hours, Asura was a giant. His head touched the sky and he had not two but four long, strong arms and two long, muscular legs. He was so huge that, when he crossed the deepest rivers, the water only came to his instep. When he crossed the oceans, the water only reached his knees. If he extended his arms, he could touch the sun and hold the moon in his hands.

When Asura was older, his mother urged him to marry the daughter of the Fragrant Mountain God. Since the giant had never seen the girl, he turned towards Fragrant Mountain to try and catch a glimpse of her. Nearly blinded by the brilliant sun, Asura only saw some fairies dancing on the mountain. He

could not see the daughter of the Fragrant Mountain God. Frustrated, he reached out, grasped the sun and thrust it behind his back. Now he could see the girl, who was so beautiful that Asura fell in love instantly and before long they were married.

Later, the Buddha made Asura a god and took the Colossus to the Paradise of Buddhism.

83

Fasting Wolf

Ceiling, Cave 249, Western Wei Dynasty, 535-556

Once upon a time, in a mountain far away lived a vigorous male wolf, which was fierce and cruel. He went out hunting during a heavy rain that lasted seven days and nights: it seemed endless. The sheep and rabbits hid themselves so well that the wolf could find nothing to eat as he went through the mountains. The starving wolf thought since there was no target in the mountains that he would launch a raid on the villages nearby. His incredible hunger would be satiated if he could luckily find any sheep or pigs. The wolf snuck down to the village and then he realized that his idea was poor! Sheep-herders fed their sheep within the fold in rainy days and the sheep pen is heavily patrolled by shepherd dogs. After running around seven villages without any payoff, the wolf almost starved to death.

The wolf blamed himself, "What a poor wolf I am! I could not find anything to eat in seven villages! What makes this different from fasting? All right! I would rather fast for the great beyond!" Then the wolf returned to his cave in the mountain and swore, "From now on I will pray to Buddha and follow dharma to fast! I will not kill anymore! I will not eat meat anymore! I will leave the whole mountain and village to find a peaceful life!" The wolf finished his vow, sat cross-legged, closed his eyes and confessed his mistakes.

It was just passed noontime when the wolf heard a sheep's Baa Baa Baa. He opened his eyes and found a group of sheep outside his cave. The wolf murmured delightedly, "What a miracle! My fast paid back so quickly! The sheep came all their way themselves! I will continue fasting after I finished this delicious food."

The wolf stood up and left the cave. The sheep ran in panic. The wolf focused on a fat sheep and charged like a bullet.

The sheep exerted the utmost strength to escape when he saw the wolf.

The wolf followed his target but no matter how hard he tried, he could not catch the sheep. Suddenly the sheep ran into a valley and hid. The wolf followed the sheep into the valley, but to his surprise, he found a fierce mastiff (dog) barking at him loudly. The mastiff rushed at the wolf and his voice penetrated the silent valley. The wolf knew that he could not overcome this monster and escaped. The mastiff stopped pursuing the wolf after he ran after for a while. He gave up chasing resentfully.

The wolf returned to his cave breathlessly. He sat down for a rest and sighed, "Damn it! I am planning to take the sheep for food while I almost lose my life to the mastiff. I should concentrate on my fast!" Then he closed his eyes again and sat cross-legged to recover his stamina.

In a moment, the wolf heard the sheep's Baa Baa Baa again. He could not stand it any longer and walked out of the cave. A lame sheep! A lame sheep was just staggering in front of the cave! The wolf thought I was so hungry that I wrongly took a mastiff as a sheep and I need to be very cautious this time. The wolf cleared his eyes carefully and observed that the head, body, tail, fur and color were truly different from the mastiff. In order to feed himself, he made a rush at the sheep.

Although the sheep faltered at escaping, the wolf could not catch his target because he used all his strength in the first charge. The lame sheep escaped into the forest. The wolf followed into the forest but he was unable to find any sheep. The mastiff barked loudly while the wolf was searching for his target. The wolf knew the mastiff would appear again and turned back immediately when the sound came to his ears. Just like last time, the mastiff gave up pursuing and made his way back.

Back in the cave, the wolf became mad and scared. He swore regretfully, "I missed the sheep twice and almost lost my life. I have made up my mind to

fast and never kill for the rest of my life!"

As we mentioned in the very beginning, sheepherders did not herd on rainy days. If the rain kept falling, where had the sheep come from? It was Sakra-devanam-indra actually! Recently, Sakra-devanam-indra entered the world to check the creatures who swore to fast. He made test to see how faithful the creatures are. Today he passed by and happened to find that the wolf swore to fast in the cave. He thought himself, "Some adherents swear to fast and do not kill but they are not able to obey their words. Can this wolf keep his promise? Wolf's nature is to kill and eat meat! It is a boundless beneficence if the wolf can change its nature. Although this starving wolf has sworn to fast and never to kill, I will check to see if it is true." Then Sakra-devanam-indra asked deities to change into a group of sheep and he disguised himself into the largest sheep to test this wolf. And of course he changed to the mastiff to pursue the wolf. When the wolf fell back to his cave, Sakra-devanam-indra transformed himself into the lame sheep and made noise to attract the attention of the wolf. The wolf could not stand it and rushed at the lame sheep. And the lame sheep changed into mastiff that forced the wolf back to his cave.

Sakra-devanam-indra decided to make a final trial to test the wolf. He was eager to know whether this wolf could fast and gave up killing. He transformed into a lamb and tottered into the cave with Baa Baa Baa...

The wolf could not stand it anymore when he noticed the tiny lamb in his cave. He gave up the promise and made a rush at the lamb.The lamb dodged and changed to Sakra-devanam-indra. Sakra-devanam-indra pointed at the wolf, "You made your promise and made up your mind to fast. But you were not able to change your nature and insisted on killing whenever you saw sheep. You broke your promise and cheated not only yourself but others. Deities should take this as a good lesson to not follow the wolf."

From then on, the wolf never fasted.

Translated by Lian Jinping

84

Deer King Saved Posterities

West Niche, Cave 254, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Once upon a time, a peaceful and beautiful hill lay in Varanasi. It had soft and fragrant grass, various flowers, giant trees and a brook with sweet and pure water. There lived thousands of deer, eating tender grass, drinking sweet water, relaxing in cool woods and enjoying their life. Their leader was Deer King, tall and strong with five-color of fur and coral horns. He led and protected his charges with pride.

The king of Varanasi loved hunting and killed countless animals. One day, when the king was hunting in the hill, he saw many deer living there. He felt so happy that he ordered guards to besiege the deer and attack them secretly. Being assaulted, some deer were frightened and fell down the hill, some were hurt by bramble nearby, and most were chopped and shot by guards. All over the hill were deer bodies. The injured and bleeding deer groaned. The king was delighted and dancing to have gotten so many preys.

While the Deer King witnessed the tragedy, he felt extremely sad and cried, "It was my fault to not sound an alert and fail to protect you. Who would have imagined that the kind king is actually a tyrant? Why not kill me instead?"

An old deer consoled the Deer King, "It's not the time to cry. They're already dead. What you have to do is to find a way to protect the wounded deer, and the ones still alive. Why don't you talk to the king?"

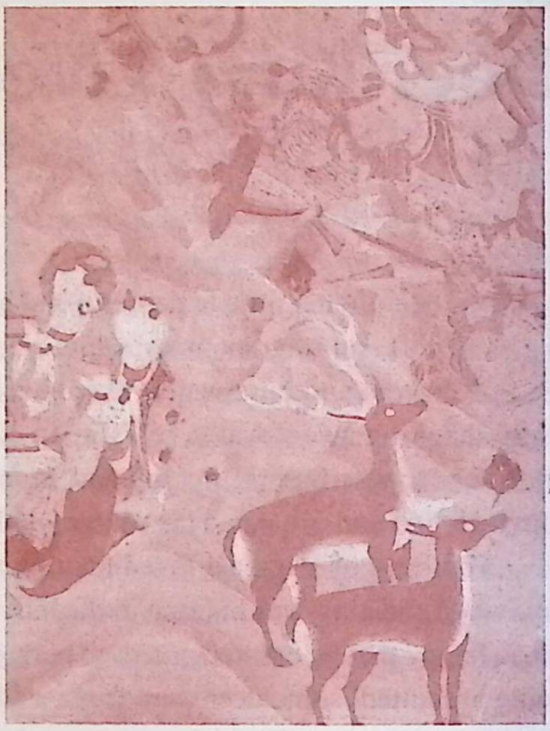
The Deer King calmed down and thought about the solution. Finally he decided to negotiate with the king. He walked out of the woods and faced the king, "Your Majesty, you came here for hunting and killed many deer. But actually how many deer do you eat every day?"

The king was astonished to hear the deer talking and answered, "One is enough."

"OK. But the deer will be extinguished if you're still-hunting like today. And the bodies will be rotten in days. You can't have fresh venison anymore."

"Eh...sounds reasonable."

"What about I send you a deer each day? Then you will have fresh venison. But, Your Majesty, please withdraw your troops and stop hunting here. OK?"



The king felt ashamed to have killed so many deer for pleasure and said, "I'm hunting for fun instead of venison. I didn't mean to kill your charges. Please forgive me. And I'll stop hunting here."

Hence, although one dear died everyday, most deer were safe. So whoever was dying faced the arrangement without an excuse. One day, a pregnant doe was going to be sent. She was not willing to take the unborn baby deer to death and begged, "Deer King, I'm not scared to be sent and I do not wanna live longer. I know it's for the deer family. But please permit me to go after the baby is born. Don't kill two lives at one time."

The Deer King approved her reasonable request and asked another deer to go instead. However, that deer also hoped to live longer and knelt in front of him, crying, "Your Majesty, I also understand the death fate. But I'm not the one going to be sent tomorrow. I wanna live one more day until my deadline without hesitation."

This deer was also right. The Deer King realized that although he was the commander of all deer, they would be killed off at the end. He decided to send

himself next morning to stop this agreement with the king. Next morning, Deer King left the hill secretly. People in town came out to have a look and rumors said that good luck was coming with Deer King or the king's kindness brought Deer King. The king did not believe at first when he heard the Deer King came by himself until the door guard told him so. The king asked all the people in town to protect the Deer King and invited him to the palace, "What's going on, Deer King?"

"Today a pregnant deer should have been sent to you. But I can't do it because I cannot make two deer die. So I'm coming instead. I hope my death will bring peace to my posterities. Don't hurt them anymore, please."

The king was deeply moved and said regretfully, "Even the animal has a heart of sympathy and will sacrifice itself to save more animals. I am the king, but every day I'm killing for fun. How ridiculous!" From then on, the king stopped the offerings of deer. The hill was marked off as the home for deer. Therefore, the woods were named as "Donated Deer Woods." Later, a temple and a stupa were set up. Sarnath was the name of the temple where Sakyamuni first practiced Dharma.

85

The Hawk, the Dove and King Sivi

North Wall, Cave 254, Northern Wei Dynasty, 386-534

The rich Shravasti was picturesque and populated by a happy people who were ruled by a humane and fair-minded king. According to the Xian Yu Scriptures, there once were two gods who magically transformed themselves into birds, the god Sakra-devanam-indra became an eagle and the god Visvakarman became a dove. One day, while King Sivi was relaxing outside a pavilion, he saw a dove darting about as it tried to evade a hunting eagle. The king waved to the dove, whereupon the bird flew to him and nestled in his armpit for protection. The eagle quickly swooped down and demanded that the king release the dove.

"I am very hungry," said the eagle ferociously. "And you have my prey. Release it to me."

"Go somewhere else and try to find some meat," said the king.

"No," the eagle screamed, "I haven't had any food for days. You who are among the well fed know little of how the starving suffer. Release the dove and let me eat my fill of fresh meat!" the eagle demanded again.

Long ago, the king made a pledge never to cause harm to any living thing for as long as he lived. Now he was faced with a terrible dilemma: if he didn't release the dove to the eagle, the eagle would surely die of starvation. However, if he released the dove to save the eagle, he would be responsible for causing the dove's death. What could he do? There was only one thing he could do to save the lives of both birds, The king offered his own flesh to the eagle.

The eagle accepted the king's offer of sustenance with the condition that the amount of flesh he received from the king be equal to that of the dove. So the king called for his official in charge of imperial weights and measures to attend him. The official arrived wearing his felt hat and high boots and set up his scales, which were made of a beam, pivoted in the middle, with a pan suspended on chains at either end.

The king gently placed the dove on one pan of the scale and then put the flesh cut off from both of his thighs on the other pan of the scale. As the fearsome eagle tore at the king's flesh, the gods appeared in the sky. Some of the gods wept for the king, others praised his actions, while still others prayed to Buddha. The king was calm and sat absolutely still.

Suddenly the earth began to shake and colorful flowers fell from the heavens, the eagle and the dove disappeared. Miraculously, the king's flesh became whole again.

The gods Sakra-devanam-indra and Visvakarman had transformed themselves into the eagle and the dove to test the king's faith. The king had proved himself a pious man and the gods rejoiced with him.

86

Nanda Tonsured

West Niche, Cave 254, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Nanda, a strong and handsome young man, was Sakyamuni's step brother.

Sundari was Nanda's beautiful wife. Sakyamuni had advised Nanda to take the tonsure (the act of the top of one's head before entering a religious sect) many times but was rejected because he was unable to bear the hardships and leave his beloved wife.

Once after dinner, when Nanda and Sundari were enjoying the beautiful scenery, Sakyamuni entered. They welcomed Sakyamuni and presented a jar of syrup to him.

Sakyamuni said, "I've already had my dinner. I'm coming to discuss the tonsure issue. Nanda, what's your decision?"

"I'm not ready. Please take the syrup first," Nanda replied.

"Alright. We will talk later." Sakyamuni left without taking the jar. However, offerings cannot be put aside if the Buddha does not accept them. So Nanda had to follow Sakyamuni holding the jar from street to street. Then all the people in town thought Nanda was going to be tonsured.

Back to the temple, Sakyamuni took the jar and started to explain Buddhism as well as abandoning lust to Nanda. If Nanda was not willing to be tonsured, he would not be permitted to return home.

Nanda reluctantly listened without saying a word, but Sakyamuni pointed at him saying mantra, "My brother Nanda, take the tonsure and start your Buddhism practice."

Nanda had no choice and took the tonsure, but he did not give up loving for his wife. Hiding Sundari's portrait, Nanda missed her deeply and decided to secularize and go back home whenever Sakyamuni was away.

Sakyamuni left for Kapilavast to teach Buddhism, leaving Nanda to guard

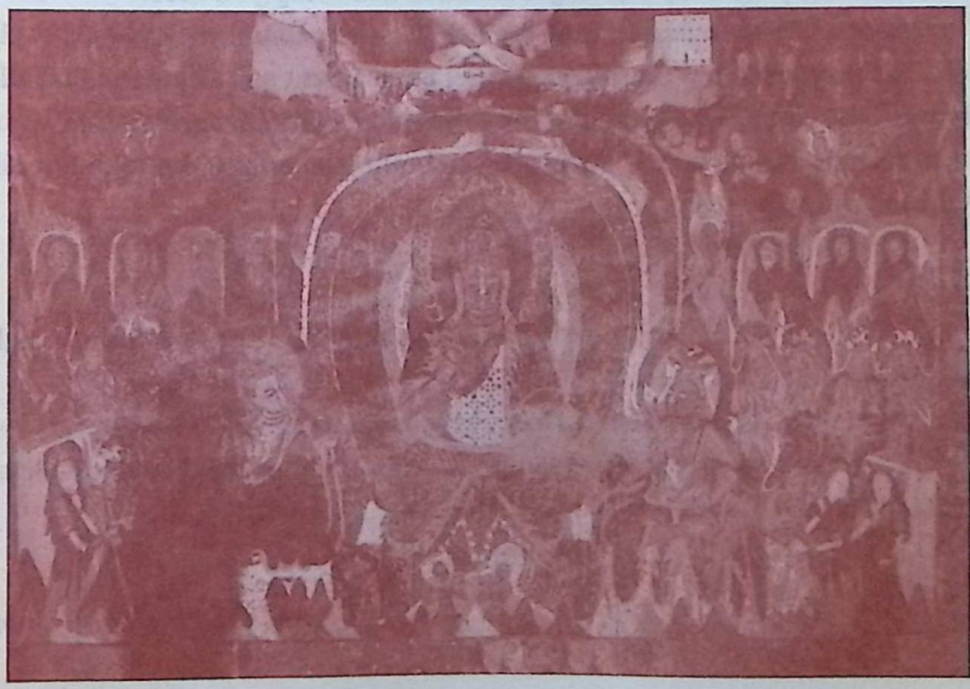
the temple. Sakyamuni knew Nanda's thoughts and warned him, "Fill the vat, clean the yard, shut all the windows and doors, and relax."

Nanda seemed to agree but intended to return home when he finished the work.

First, Nanda shouldered buckets and buckets of water, but the vat still could not be filled, so he threw the bucket and cleaned the yard.

It was a small yard, but whenever Nanda cleaned it, the wind blew and brought more leaves and weeds. The yard was still dirty. Nanda became crazy and went to shut the windows and doors. But whenever he shut one, another one was open. He guessed that other monks were fooling him, so he decided to leave quickly before Sakyamuni returned. He walked on paths instead of roads to avoid meeting with Sakyamuni. Unfortunately, after a while, he saw Sakyamuni coming. Nanda quickly hid himself behind a tall tree.

Sakyamuni already knew about his tricks and came to stop him. With his supernatural power, Sakyamuni used a fierce wind to blow away the tree, leav-



ing embarrassed Nanda standing there.

"Why didn't you fill the vat, clean the yard and shut the windows and doors? Why are you here?"

"It is not my will to be tonsured," Nanda replied furiously.

"Calm yourself. You're so shortsighted. After I take you to both heaven and hell, make your decision." Then Sakyamuni took Nanda to the heaven on a cloud.

In the splendid palace, fairies were singing and dancing. What a nice life there! But there was one fairy sitting silently.

Curious, Nanda asked, "Why are you sitting alone here?"

"I'm waiting for a man".

"Who is that?"

"Nanda, Sakyamuni's younger brother. But unluckily, he doesn't wish to abandon ordinary life. If he kept commandments and trusts Buddhism, he could be here."

Nanda was surprised and happy to hear that. Sakyamuni seized the chance and said, "Studying and practicing Buddhism will bring you here."

Nanda was silent. Back from the heaven, Sakyamuni took Nanda to the hell. The people there were suffering cruel punishment and frightened Nanda. He went to an empty pot with hot oil. A couple of jailors were adding wood under the pot. Nanda asked, "Why are you boiling an empty pot with hot oil? Where is the guilty man?"

"We are waiting for him."

"And who is that?"

"Nanda. If he still indulges himself by enjoying life, he will be caught and thrown in the pot."

Nanda was frightened and asked Sakyamuni to leave immediately.

They went back to the Banyan-park. After the journey, Nanda made up his mind to study Buddhism and finally became an arhat.

Translated by Lian Jinping

87

Deer of Nine Colors

West Wall, Cave 257, Northern Wei Dynasty, 386-534

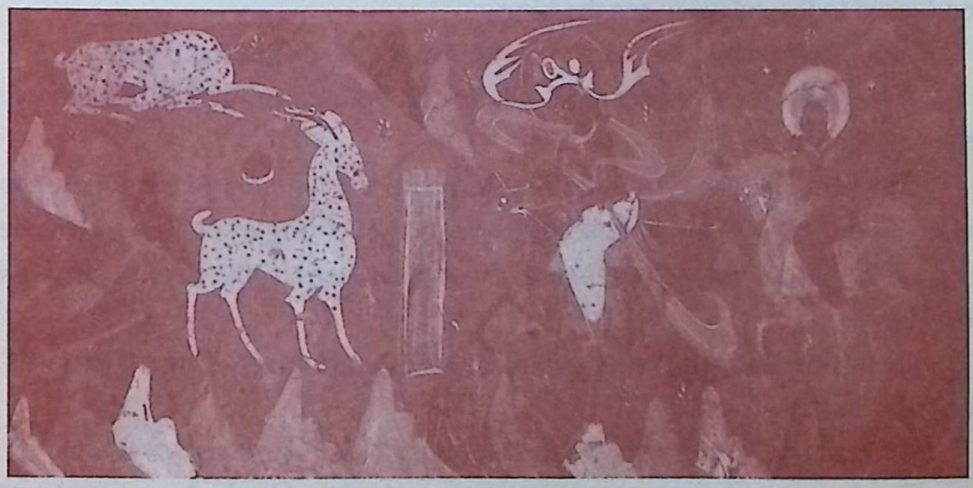
Long ago there lived a deity that took the form of a deer. He was a beautiful creature with a sparkling coat of nine different colors and majestic antlers that shone bright white, glittering and translucent like jade. He was known as Deer of Nine Colors.

One day, as the deer browsed the sweet grasses along the riverbank, he suddenly heard desperate cries coming from the river.

"Help! Help! Mountain gods, tree god, dragon god, the gods in heaven, please come to my rescue!"

The deer raised his head and saw a man clutching a log as he was being swept downstream by the current. The deer jumped into the river and swam to the man, who clung to the deer's back as they struggled out of the river onto the riverbank.

Devadatta was very grateful and got down on his knees before the deer.



"You have saved my life and I am your willing servant until the day I die," he said.

"No," replied the deer kindly, "it is my pleasure to help people. Go back to your home and recover. I have only one request for you. Do not tell anyone that you have met me here by the river."

Devadatta promised and returned to his home.

One night, the imperial concubine dreamed of a deer with nine colors. When she awoke the next morning, her eyes glittered with greed. If she had a cloak made of a deerskin of nine colors, she would be the most noble royal concubine, but there was no such cloak. The royal concubine became so obsessed by her desire for the cloak and fretted so much that she made herself deathly ill.

When the king heard that his royal concubine was dying, he went to inquire about the source of her illness. The imperial concubine told the king about her dream and urgently implored him to find her the deer with a ninecolor coat, for only this would restore her health. The king agreed, promising to give her anything in the world that she desired if it would make her well again.

Imperial notices were then posted throughout the land, announcing that anyone who could capture the Deer of Nine Colors would be given gold bowls and half the kingdom as a reward. No one knew where to find the deer. No one, that is, except Devadatta. When he saw the imperial notice he ripped it down and rushed to the palace to see the king.

"So," the excited king said, "you know where to find the deer?'

"I not only know where to find him," Devadatta bragged, "I have even seen and spoken to him."

Devadatta led the king and his soldiers to the Ganges River where they found the deer lying in the grass beside the water. The king's soldiers surrounded the deer, but just as they were about to shoot their arrows, the deer dashed over to the king.

"I have one request before you kill me," he said to the king. "Who was it that told you that I was here?"

"It was him," the king responded, pointing his finger at Devadatta.

The deer angrily denounced Devadatta and related to the king how he had

saved Devadatta from drowning in the river.

Raising his voice, the deer addressed the king, "Your Majesty, to have such a dishonorable person in your country shames you. He promised never to reveal my whereabouts to anyone, but he broke his promise. He is a mean-spirited person who repays kindness with enmity. That is all. I am ready now to be killed."

The king was moved by the deer's story and was so embarrassed by the behavior of his subject that he got down from his horse and apologized to the deer. Turning to Devadatta, he said, "You are despicable. Be gone!"

From that time on, the king proclaimed that all the people in his kingdom would protect all deer, especially the Deer of Nine Colors.

88

Little Sramanera, the Devout Monk

South Wall, Cave 257, Northern Wei Dynasty, 386-534

Long ago there was an old man who was a devout Buddhist. The old man had only one son. He sent him to a nearby monastery where the boy could become an excellent scholar and a man of character. The boy was intelligent and studied very hard, learning the Buddhist sutras by heart in a very short period of time. The elder Bhiksuni liked the old man's son very much and called him Little Sramanera.

Not far from the monastery lived Upasaka, the alms-giver, and his family. Upasaka was very kind to the monks and regularly sent them food. One day, Upasaka's family was invited by a friend to dinner. Everyone was eager to attend, but someone had to stay behind to look after the house. Upasaka's attractive young daughter volunteered to stay behind. Her father was pleased and praised her as a sensible daughter. The family left her in charge and happily set off for dinner. However, Youposa had forgotten to instruct his daughter to send food to the monastery.

At sunset that evening, the monks were very hungry, but no food had been delivered to them. Finally, the elder Bhiksuni asked Little Sramanera to go to Youposa's house to find out what happened. As Little Sramanera was about to depart, the elder Bhiksuni called him aside.

"Do whatever the Buddha teaches us," the Bhiksuni counseled urgently. "The Buddhist sutras are easy enough to say but difficult to live up to. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, I understand," Little Sramanera replied. "I shall strive never to be unworthy of your tireless and sincere teachings."

Little Sramanera knocked on the door of Upasaka's house. Upasaka's

daughter was startled and tiptoed to the door to inquire who was there.

"It's Sramanera from the monastery. The master has asked me to come to collect some food."

Upasaka's daughter opened the door and was pleased to see a handsome young monk standing there. She had heard a great deal about the intelligent and handsome Sramanera. Now, when she looked upon him with her own eyes, she instantly fell in love with him. Politely, she asked him into the room, but he seemed unwilling to enter and stayed at a distance away from her, so she grasped his arm and dragged him into the room.

Little Sramanera sat for a moment and then said, "Please give me some food and let me leave."

"There is no reason to hurry," the girl replied. "You so seldom come out, why don't you stay longer?"

Providing him with fruit and cakes, the girl thought how wonderful it would be to marry this handsome young man.

"Amitabha," said the young monk, calling upon the blessing of the Great Buddha, "the Great Master asked me to come for some food. Please give me some, for I must go back now."

"No, stay a little longer," the girl implored, "my father is coming soon." She tried even harder to please Sramanera and distract him with her dancing and conversation.

"Little Sramanera," she said sweetly, "I don't understand why you are so willing to become a disciple of Buddha. Such a life simply invites difficulties

and you will lead an austere and boring existence. Why don't we get married and have children and live a normal life as others do?"

"No, no," Little Sramanera cried, "I am already a follower of Buddhism. I do what the Buddha teaches me and the denial of lust is part of our monastic discipline. Please," he pleaded, "just give me some food and let me go."

But the girl was determined to convince Little Sramanera to marry her. "My family is wealthy so we would have a pleasant life," she cajoled as she took his hands in hers.

Little Sramanera snatched his hands away and stammered, "I...I am a... a...d-disciple of Buddhism. I... I..."

"If you won't marry me," the girl interrupted, "I will kill myself, and then you will know how sincere and earnest I am."

Little Sramanera was in a dilemma. "I cannot simply refuse her request," he thought. "She would be upset or angry if I did that. I must resolve this problem peacefully. But how? I would rather die myself than break the rules of Buddha." With that, Little Sramanera concluded that he would sacrifice himself to uphold the purity of Buddhism.

"Your offer of marriage is so sudden," he said with a smile. "Let me give it special consideration for a few moments before I give you my answer."

"Wonderful!" said the girl and she jumped to her feet. "I'11 go and prepare some food and await your good news." She went into the kitchen and cooked several dishes, all the while thinking about their engagement celebration. Two hours passed while she waited in the kitchen. Impatient now, she knocked on the door. When there was no response she pushed open the door and saw Little Sramanera lying in a pool of blood. Shocked by the terrible scene that lied before her, she fainted.

The families returned from their friend's home and were stunned to see the two young people lying on the bloody floor. The handsome young monk was beyond their help, but their daughter soon revived and told them what had happened.

"If I'd known this was going to happen," she wailed, "I would not have tried to force him to agree to marry me." The girl wept tears of shame and remorse.

When the king heard what had happened, he was moved by the young monk's devotion and went to Upasaka's house to make arrangements for the young monk's body. He decreed that the body of Little Sramanera should be placed inside the Seven-Gem Chariot and that the daughter should ride the horse as it pulled the chariot through the city. The people crowded into the street to hear the daughter's tale of how Little Sramanera abided by the principles of monastic Buddhism. The people admired the young monk's devotion and his story has never been forgotten. Pilgrims still come to the Caves of a Thousand Buddhas to burn incense and pray in memory of Little Sramanera.

89

Sumati Invited the Buddha

West and North Wall, Cave 257, Northern Wei Dynasty, 386-534

In ancient India, there lived two wealthy men in two countries. Sudatta lived in the country of Rajagaha and Welloff in the country of Wealthful. They both were very rich and they had been acquainted since childhood. Since they lived in two different countries, they seldom visited each other.

One day, Welloff came to the country of Rajagaha on business and paid a visit to his friend. The two were very excited when they met each other and Sudatta gave a banquet in honor of his friend. His daughter came out to greet the guest. She was extraordinarily beautiful, so when Welloff saw her, he felt very happy.

"We have been friends for many years, but I did not know you had such a beautiful daughter," said the guest. "I have a son and I have been looking for a wife for him. Is your daughter engaged?"

"No," replied Sudatta, "but I am afraid that it is not proper for them to get married. My daughter believes in Buddhism, but your family believes in paganism. Our families are different from each other. How can they get married?"

Sudatta was reluctant to marry his daughter to the son of Welloff but he could not refuse him in person, so he thought of an idea and said, "To tell you

the truth, my daughter really believes in Buddhism, so I have to ask the Buddha about it." Sudatta went to consult the Buddha. The Buddha advised him that his daughter should be married to that country and the people there would be saved. Sudatta came back and told Welloff to fix the wedding date.

There was a traditional custom at that time in the country of Wealthful that the man would be punished if he married a foreign woman. The punishment was that he must give a huge dinner on the day of his marriage and be the servant of the 6,000 heretics.

Welloff knew that he had violated the custom, so he invited 6,000 pagans to the dinner. These pagans came to the party but they were all naked. Welloff called Sumati, his daughter-in-law, to come out and greet the so-called guests.

"What did you say?" Sumati said angrily, "I am from a noble family. Why should I pay respect to those nudes?" Welloff explained that it was the custom of his country. "What custom?" Sumati lost her patience. "They are a group of shameless pagans. What is the difference between them and beasts?" Sumati felt greatly mistreated and insulted. She wept and said again, "If my parents had known you are so insensible, they would not have let me fall into such a mire."

Welloff and the groom were angry with her but did not know what to do. In the end they had to go and make their apologies to the so-called guests. However, in the living room, the pagans were shouting out their anger and complaints. Welloff smiled and bowed before them and explained that the bride was not well and asked them for forgiveness. The dinner ended in discord. Welloff was very much annoyed. He thought that his daughter-in-law was ill tempered. Just at this moment, a Brahman immortal named Theubha came to see him. This immortal was a knowledgable scholar and had obtained the Buddhist truth. Seeing that his friend was so worried, he asked, "What's happening? What causes you so much worry? Now that you are living a life of plenty, you should be in high spirits."

Then Welloff told him what had happened. When Theubha heard the name of Sumati, he was very surprised, "What? Sumati has married your son?" he startled. "Do you know her master? Her master is the most powerful Buddha." The immortal then told him his personal experience.

"One day, I came to a fountain. When I was ready to drink some water, all of a sudden all kinds of deities appeared and shouted angrily to me and asked me to get out of the fountain. I was rather thirsty then, and I just wanted to drink a bit to quench my thirst. I was also a famous immortal. I hesitated, but they came at me with knives. I was very frightened and left there hurriedly. Just at that moment, I saw a Sramanera coming towards the fountain with clothes stained with dirt and blood held in his hands." He was the youngest follower of Sakyamuni. To my surprise, all the deities vied with one another to salute him and they helped him wash clean the blood stained clothes, and then they dried the clothes for him. I saw how those deities took care of him. Just imagine, if the youngest follower of Sakyamuni is that powerful, how powerful are his elderly disciples and himself? To tell you the truth, Sumati, your daughter-in-law is also one of the disciples of Sakyamuni."

Welloff was shocked when he heard the story and said that he wanted to see Sakyamuni.

"You have to ask your daughter-in-law if she will allow you to do so," His friend told him.

When his friend left, Welloff forced himself to talk to Sumati and asked if he could see her master himself. Sumati was very happy and promised him that her master would come tomorrow. According to Sumati's arrangement, Welloff asked the maids to clean the halls and make preparations.

The next day, all the townspeople knew that the Buddha would come, so they all waited on both sides of the road for the exciting moment. Soon a heavenly man came down from the sky with a huge pot on his back. "Is he your master?" asked Welloff.

"No," answered Sumati, "he is not my master. He is only a servant coming ahead to prepare food, because my master and his son don't eat food from outside." At that moment, a colorful tree descended from the sky, he asked again, "Is this your master coming?"

"No,"answered Sumati, "he is the youngest disciple, Kunti."

And then, many elder disciples visited, Cullapanthaka with 500 green cows, Rahulata with 500 peacocks, Mahqkaceqra with 500 swans, Big Kasyapa with 500 red horses and Anuruddha with 500 lions. Welloff asked each of them

but none of them was Sakyamuni. All of a sudden, the whole world was covered with Buddhist light, and Welloff was so frightened that he was motionless. Sumati said excitedly, "This is my master, and please prepare to meet him." After the words, the master appeared in the sky and gradually descended. On seeing this, people in the country of wealth worshiped him on bent knees. Later, Sakyamuni came to Welloff's home and he expressed with reverence and awe that he would convert to Buddhism.

90

Vicious Dog and Its Predestined Relation with Buddhism

South Wall, Cave 257, Northern Wei Dynasty, 386-534

Once in Rajagrh (house of the king), there lived a very rich elder. The elder raised an incredibly fierce guard dog that attacked many people. To visit, people needed to inform the elder in advance. Because of the vicious dog, no thief dared to come near the house, no beggars had the nerve to beg for anything, and no Buddhist monk had the courage to beg alms. The elder, therefore, lived a happy and undisturbed life.

One day, a young Buddhist monk arrived at the elder's house to beg for alms. A kindhearted neighbor warned him, "Sramana (Buddhist monk), you may go to any other family to beg for alms but not that one, for the family has an extremely brutal dog." With a smile on his face, the Buddhist monk said, "The almighty power of Buddhism may enlighten all living things to seek goodness. Now, I am about to beg for food and alms to see how fierce the dog may be." After saying that, the Buddhist monk went directly toward the gate of the elder's house.

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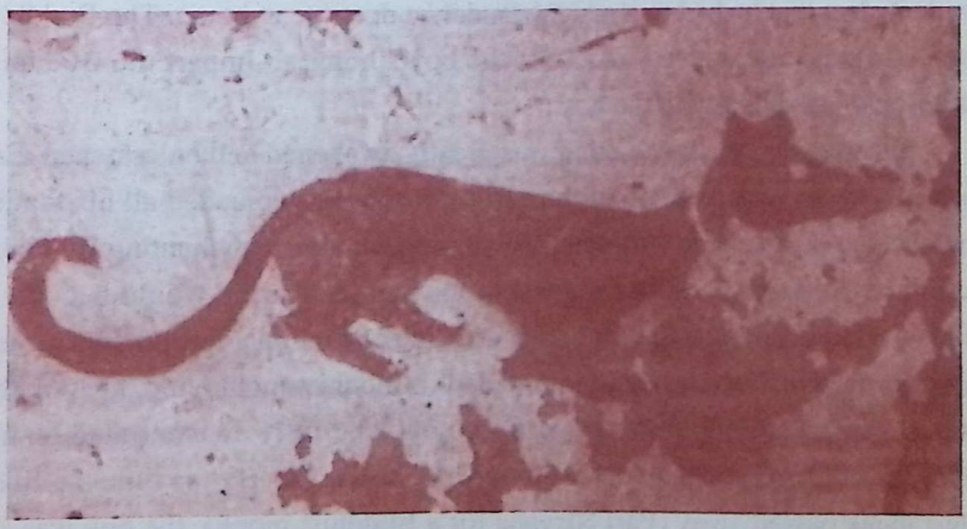
When he went inside the gate, he failed to see any trace of the dog. Entering into the living room, he saw the elder and explained his purpose. The elder was rather mystified how the young Buddhist monk could safely enter without notifying him in advance and without any bark from the guard dog who never let any strangers in. Regardless of that, he told his servants to serve the Buddhist monk a vegetarian meal and to wait on him enthusiastically.

It turns out that the dog slept soundly at the foot of the south wall in the warm spring sunshine. Therefore, it didn't know that the Buddhist monk entered the house. Getting to the door of the living room, the guard dog found the young Buddhist monk enjoying his meal. The dog told itself, "Now he has been taken as a distinguished guest. I can't bite him even if I anxiously want to. If he eats up the entire meal alone, I will pounce on him, bite him to death and take him and the food in his stomach as my feast when he comes out. If he shares half of his food with me, I'll just let him go safely."

Seeing the ferocious brightness in its eyes, the young Buddhist monk immediately read the guard dog's mind with his power and insight acquired through years' of practicing Buddhism. He then gave the dog half of his meal. After the dog had the meal, the look in his eyes became gentler. Then the dog



expressed its gratefulness by licking the feet of the Buddhist monk. Thereupon, the Buddhist monk expounded texts of Buddhism to the elder and his dog to persuade them to abandon the earthly vice and grow benevolence in their heart, thus, bringing more goodness to the world.

After accepting the Buddhist monk's preaching of Buddhist doctrine, the vicious dog gave up its ferocity and no longer attacked anyone. However, those once wounded by the dog did not give up their hatred for it and sought every chance to seek revenge on it. One day, the vengeful were given their chance. When it fell asleep outside the elder's house, the dog was beheaded.

After the vicious dog died, it was reborn into another elder's home as a boy. The boy loved worshipping Buddha, chanting sutra in Buddhist scripture and being nice to Buddhist monks. When he was a teenager, he requested his parents' permission to take tonsure and become a Buddhist monk. However, he did not get permission, because he was the only baby his parents had ever had.

One day, present at home was a Buddhist monk begging for alms. Seeing him, the boy was extremely happy. Inviting him in, with great zest, he treated the Buddhist monk to a fantastic vegetarian meal. Later, he asked his parents to allow him to take the Buddhist monk as his teacher who would teach him Buddhist doctrine. Though his parents had to comply with their son's request, they made it clear that he had to study the Buddhist doctrine at home. The Buddhist monk, in this case, agreed to stay at the boy's home to impart the Buddhist philosophy specifically to the boy.

By studying, the boy's mind was greatly awakened and enlightened. Endowed with great perception of the earthly world, he persuaded all his family members to do the same with him, worshiping Buddha and chanting Buddhist scripture. He made a further request to his parents that he would become a Buddhist monk and practice Buddhist doctrine in a temple. His parents turned him down again. Hence, before initiated into Buddhist monkhood, he took the utmost care to provide for the Buddhist monk and fully concentrated on his study, practicing Buddhism unremittingly day and night. By the time the Buddhist monk passed away (Pari Nirvana for a Buddhist monk), the boy was al-

lowed by his parents to have his head shaved as a Buddhist order and became a Buddhist monk.

The Buddhist monk, provided for by the boy, proved to be the young one who had given the dog half of his vegetarian meal, and also the one who had taught it the first lesson of Buddhist doctrine.

Translated by Sun Jing

91

The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma at Deer Park

North Wall, Cave 263, Northern Wei Dynasty, 386-534

The Deer Park at Varanasi was the place where Siddhartha (Sakyamuni, or Buddha) delivered his first sermon on Buddhism when he achieved his enlightenment after six years of striving to crack the code of suffering in search of ultimate awareness. At first, he had only five disciples and they were Kondanna, Asajit, Bhadrika, Dasabala Kasapa, and Mahanama Kulika. Through Buddha's instruction and their unremitting practice of Buddhism, the five of them became extremely eminent Buddhist monks afterwards.

In the past, Siddhartha wanted to become a Buddhist monk to seek the way to transcend earthly life, but he encountered vigorous opposition from his father, King Suddhodana, and other family members. Despite their disapproval, Siddhartha overcame the obstacles and at last, he succeeded in escaping from his home and began his journey to seek enlightenment and become a Buddhist monk.

Discovering the escape of his son, his father, King Suddhodana, was startled. Immediately he sent his men to chase him on their stealthy horses hoping to make the crown prince change his mind and return. However, the crown prince was so resolute in his decision that no one could stop him from becoming a Buddhist monk. Knowing his son could by no means be brought back, his father sent five trusted fellows to serve the crown prince. Receiving instruction to stay with the crown prince, the five companions went to practice Buddhism with Siddhartha in the depth of a remote mountain and at the same time they explored methods to renounce and abandon misery, suffering, life

and death in the earthly world.

The five people often discussed with the crown prince the methods to attain awakening and insights, Should one cultivate oneself in ascetic practices or in peace and happiness? Two of them contended that they should practice Buddhism in peace and happiness, while the other three argued that practicing Buddhism could only be accomplished in an ascetic manner. It was not easy to judge who was right and who was wrong, for both sides refused to give in. In order to prove the feasibility of practicing Buddhism in an ascetic manner, Siddhartha, the crown prince, had only one meal a day which made him skinny, scrawny, and withered. He nearly starved to death. In view of this, Siddhartha concluded that they should practice Buddhism in peace and happiness but not in an ascetic manner.

Not agreeing with Siddhartha on this point, the five people left the crown prince to seek their own ways of practicing Buddhism. Siddhartha remained where he was. Sitting cross-legged in Buddhist meditative position under the Bodhi tree, he eventually comprehended the essence of Buddhism, accomplished complete awakening, and became a supreme Buddha with unsurpassed wisdom. At the beginning, he immersed himself in the joy of success, enjoying spiritually and the delight brought to him by achieving Buddhahood.

Before long, through further and more profound meditation, he came to realize that the prime mission of Buddha was to bring universal salvation to all

living things. Siddhartha realized he must make it known to the universe the truth that he had attained and to help the universe crack the code of suffering in search of ultimate awareness. He wondered who should be the first to impart the Buddhist doctrine to. He determined that his first audience, and his first disciples, needed to be chosen carefully.

Siddhartha knew that not everyone was ready to accept his teaching and attain the ultimate insight. Only those who were spiritually prepared could be chosen as his disciples. Therefore, he remembered Uddaka Ramaputta, his former teacher, who practiced Buddhism in a remote mountain. He was solid and steady in nature, intelligent, brilliant and eloquent. Thus, Uddaka Ramaputta would be the right soul to accept his discovery. As he went in search of his teacher, he was sad to find that his teacher had died several months earlier.

After great consideration, Buddha felt Alara Kalama could also be taught as he made increasing progress in practicing Buddhism. He then sent for Alara Kalama, but unfortunately, he learned that Alara Kalama died five days earlier. It was a great regret that Alara Kalama was unable to listen to Buddha's lectures.

Buddha had to ponder the appropriate candidates once more. The five old companions came into his mind. The five of them had once been his companions, serving him and seeking enlightenment with him. They would be the only ones who had the intelligence and foundation to accept Buddha's almighty knowledge and insights-Dharma. When he discovered that they were practicing Buddhism at the Deer Park in Varanasi, he decided to meet them there. The morning of the meeting, the sun rose at dawn, scattering myriads of colorful sunrays into the sky. Bathed in the brilliance of the sunrays, Buddha, radiating holy light, walked toward the Deer Park in an austere manner.

Seeing Sakyamuni approaching, Kondanna and the other four discussed whether or not to give Buddha a ceremonial welcome. Bhadrika said, "Sakyamuni has abandoned his search and become undisciplined. We don't have to pay homage to such a pleasure-seeking and self-indulgent person. It is also unnecessary to welcome him, don't even make a sitting place for him, just let it be."

"Ok, he deserves to be disrespected," three of the group members agreed. Only Kondanna felt differently. He said, "We are relatives. How could we treat

him that way?"

"If you like, you can welcome him all by yourself!" responded the rest of the group. Intimidated by the other four, Kondanna followed their lead, not doing anything to greet Buddha.

Sitting respectively in place, the five of them kept silent in Buddhist meditation. Though they pretended not to see Buddha when he reached them, they couldn't help feeling violent tides surging in their minds. Their moods were aroused to such a height of excitement that they could not remember a single word from their earlier discussion. As if driven by an invisible omnipotent power, rising on their feet and with smile on their faces, they honored Buddha by kneeing down. After the salutation, they made a seat for Buddha, bathed him with water and served him with tea to quench his thirst.

Buddha sat high upon his seat. Then Kondanna and the rest asked respectfully, "Honored prince, viewing your beaming face, serene manner, and radiant body with golden light, we dare say that you have attained perfect illumination and become a Buddha."

Buddha replied back, "You may say so. I have achieved supreme enlightenment. You must give up the wrong process of practicing Buddhism and adopt the right method that I'm going to teach you to accomplish your awakening. When you attain your enlightenment, you must broadly transmit the Buddhist doctrine to the worldly people. By the time your audience, male or female, are ready to abandon their earthly life, take tonsure and become Buddhist monks or nuns, you will be able to attain perfect illumination, free from the code of life and death in the earthly world."

With the new teachings of Buddha, Kondanna and his group felt themselves seeing new light. They then prostrated themselves immediately in awe, and officially converted into Buddhist monks. Buddha thereupon got his first five disciples.

Buddha preached his first sermon to the five. He addressed them, "You must listen attentively, take notes earnestly, and bear in mind a firm memory of the Four Noble Truths: Dukkha Sacca (the universality of suffering), Samudaya Sacca (the cause of suffering through selfish desire), Nirodha Sacca (the solution to suffering), and Magga Sacca (the way to overcome suffering)." He then

proceeded with a detailed explanation of the essence of the Four Noble Truths

The first sermon delivered by Buddha after he attained his supreme enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree is historically known as the sermon that " set the wheel of Dharma in motion." It was at the Deer Park in Varanasi that the first teaching took place. It was there that Buddha expounded his "Four Noble Truths," which is the foundation of all Buddhist belief.

Translated by Sun Jing

92

Moonlight King Donated His Head

North Wall, Cave 275, Northern Liang Dynasty, 397-445

Long ago there lived a greatly respected king named Tchandraprabha. His palace was brightly lit, as if it was bathed by moonlight. Therefore, he was called "the Moonlight King."

The 84,000 small kingdoms governed by the king had favorable weather and abundant harvests year round. People there enjoyed their happy lives. Although his subjects had stable and peaceful lives, he still gave alms to the poor every year. Gold, silver, jewelry, clothes and the basic necessities, rice, flour and grain were piled in front of the city gates on both sides of the road for his subjects to choose from.

One year, not only did the Moonlight King give alms in the capital city Xianshou, but he also sent an imperial decree to every kingdom ordering alms to be given to the local people. He told the ruler of each kingdom, "I wholeheartedly hope you love your citizens and try to satisfy the needs of every person in your kingdom." A sign was posted on the wall of the capital telling the people to take whatever they wanted from the palace. The people of the capital all praised the Moonlight King as very wise and sagacious. His good reputation soon spread everywhere.

In a small kingdom, far away from the capital lived a king named Vimasna. He was greedy and obsessed with riches. When he learned of the Moonlight King's order to give alms, he was outraged and screamed, "If I don't kill the Moonlight King, I will be unable to protect my property and my extravagant life." He was furious and summoned his officials to plan the assassination of the Moonlight King. However, his officials knew the virtues of the king. When

they learned of King Vimasna's schemes, they made excuses, claiming they were unable to carry out his plan. King Vimasna finally murmured to himself, "The brave men will come forward if I offer extraordinary rewards." The next morning, a public notice announced that the person who brought the Moonlight King's head to King Vimasna would share half of the national lands and marry the princess.

The Brahman heretic Raudrakasa lived in this kingdom. When he saw the notice, he was quite delighted and came to answer the call. King Vimasna was pleased and told Raktahsha again and again, "If you succeed in this, I will keep my promise. You should start your journey right away." Raudrakasa asked King Vimasna to prepare provisions for the journey and promised to set out in seven days. The heretic then returned to the mountains, sat in meditation and read incantations for protection.

Seven days later, he came to the king and bade him farewell. King Vimasna prepared everything the heretic needed and saw him off.

The news of Raudrakasa's mission preceded him to the capital. When he arrived at the main gate of the city, he insisted upon an audience with the Moonlight King. Because of his ferocious features, the guards stopped him from entering the city, making him walk around the city walls several times. The minister Dayue granted Raudrakasa an audience and asked him, "Why are you so anxious to meet with the Moonlight King?"

"I hear that the king is unparalleled in kindness and grants everything that people ask for. He is well known as a generous king. Therefore, I'm here begging for his head."

Dayue was shocked and realized that the rumors of the plot to sever the king's head were true. He asked Raudrakasa to stay beside the main gate and promised that he would bring something precious and valuable for him. One hour later, the minister returned with a head-shaped parcel made of gold, silver, diamonds and colorful rubies. The minister told the heretic, "The Moonlight King's head is nothing but flesh and blood. What is it good for? This head includes seven kinds of treasures. I will give it to you and guarantee that you and your descendants will enjoy great wealth for generations to come."

Unwilling to look at it, Raudrakasa said with a bitter laugh, "I don't want these treasures. I want the king's head." Having said this, he prepared to rush to the city gate. Resourcefully, Dayue stopped him and drew out his sword. Then he said, "I will grant you an audience with the king, but if you ask for his head, I'll kill you."

Realizing he was at a disadvantage, the heretic thought, "A wise man does not fight when the odds are against him." So, in order to get out of the tight situation, he promised that he would not ask for the head of the king.

Raudrakasa swaggered into the royal palace and shouted that he wanted something from the king.

King Tchandraprabha heard the cry and hurried out to welcome the man. He greeted the man, inviting him to the seat of honor and asked him what he wanted. The king promised that he would give him anything he needed. "I have already taken all the treasures of the royal stores and put them at the city gates. What else could you want?" And then the king asked if the heretic wanted lands, towns, the queen, his children, servants, treasures, horses, and other precious gifts.

But Raudrakasa said, "Anything from you will be of little use to me. I have come from far away and I want something more valuable. If Your Majesty will keep your promise, please give me your head."

"What?" screamed all the ministers in the royal palace. The king, however, was delighted when he heard this.

"I can satisfy your request," the king answered calmly.

"When will you give me your head?" Raudrakasa asked eagerly.

"In seven days," the king answered firmly.

During the following seven days, the city was filled with sorrow. Kings from many kingdoms came and tried wholeheartedly to dissuade Tchandraprabha. Imperial concubines implored with tears, thousands of citizens cried in the palace, and some of the ministers committed suicide.

Nevertheless, King Tchandraprabha, stood calmly before the crowds. He held his chest high and said, "Since I was born into the human world, I am a creature of sin and therefore should abandon this sinful body. Today I will give this head to the Brahman and I will gain enlightenment. I vowed I would strive for this. If I succeed, I will save you from a sea of misery. So don't stand in my way. Let me fulfill my will."

The ministers, the kings from the small kingdoms, and the king's wives, sons and daughters fell silent after hearing the king's words.

The king then turned to Raudrakasa and said, "Now you can cut off my head and take it."

"You are very well protected by the crowd, and I am alone, so I am too weak to take your head," Raudrakasa said. "If Your Majesty is really willing to give me your head, please come with me to the back garden where it is quiet, with beautiful flowers and green trees."

The king stood under the weeping willow, and handing a sword to Raudrakasa, asked the heretic to fulfill the king's promise and help him gain enlightenment.

93

King Vilenjeli Suffered a Thousand Nails in His Body

Mid-Level, Cave 275, Northern Liang Dynasty, 397-445

We learn from legend that there once lived a king in ancient India named King Vilenjeli. He ruled 4,000 small kingdoms and had 20,000 imperial concubines, 500 princes and 10,000 ministers. He was good-natured and pure in mind. He cared for his subjects with great solicitude and indeed he was loved and esteemed by the people.

King Vilenjeli believed in Buddhism and was eager to see the pure Buddhist instructions. Therefore, he sent his messengers from one kingdom to another to look for those who could expound the texts of Buddhism and promised to give them everything they asked.

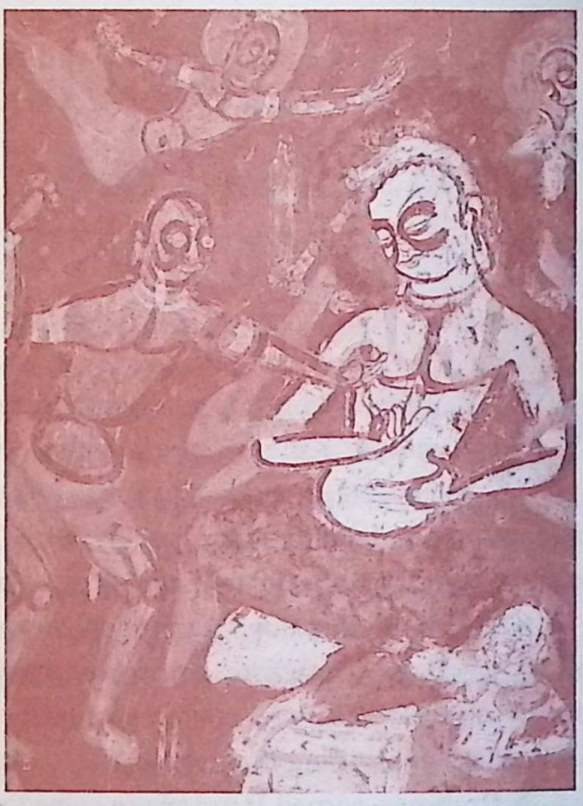
A Brahman named Raudrakasa came to the royal palace and said that he knew the true Buddhist scriptures and doctrines and publicly announced that he would teach anyone who wanted to learn.

King Vilenjeli was delighted to hear the scriptures and left the palace to meet the man. He invited Raudrakasa to the seat of honor in the palace. Then the king put his palms together, asking Raudrakas to teach him true Buddhist doctrine.

King Vilenjeli respectfully said, "I am your humble follower awaiting your teachings, master."

But Raudrakasa rolled his small eyes and said, "Be patient. It is not an easy job to study Buddhism. I have been toiling day and night, suffering in order to gain the true Buddhist doctrine. How can I teach you for nothing?"

King Vilenjeli put his crossed hands on his chest and said earnestly, "I've already promised to give you everything you want. Remember, I'll never break my word."



"Excellent! After expounding the true Buddhist doctrine, I'll put 1,000 nails into your body," said Raudrakasa. "Is that acceptable?"

"Certainly," the king replied without hesitation. "I'll let you do that in seven days."

When the news spread throughout the kingdoms, thousands of ministers and advisors rushed to the capital to dissuade the king.

"We depend on Your Majesty for protection and we are now living in peace and contentment under your leadership. For the sake of your subjects, we beg Your Majesty not to torture yourself in that way."

But the king showed his determination and no one could convince him.

King Vilenjeli expressed his gratitude to the crowd and then said, "Since I was born, I have had countless lives and deaths. The accumulated bones of my dead bodies could be piled up higher than the peak of Sumeru Mountain and my blood could fill all the seas. Today I am going to have 1,000 nails put into my body because I want to gain the Buddhist doctrine. When I become a Buddha, I'll teach you the Buddhist scripture and save all the people from poverty, famine, disease and war."

Everybody became silent. King Vilenjeli turned to Raudrakasa and said, "Please seize the opportunity and teach me the sacred doctrine. You may teach me while you are putting the nails into my body."

Raudrakasa looked excited and began to chant:

Nothing in the world is permanent.
And every living creature is in grief.
The Buddhist doctrine belongs to all people.
And I, myself, cannot own it.

While chanting those words, he was driving the iron nails into the king's body.

King Vilenjeli's wives and concubines, the ministers and the kings from the small kingdoms could not bear to watch the dreadful sight. They prostrated themselves before the king. The earth quaked and the heavens trembled.

Kings and gods of the heavens looked down and were deeply moved by the king's action. Tears fell from their eyes. They flew down together, scattering many varieties of flowers to offer provisions for King Vilenjeli.

Sakra descended heaven and praised him highly, "You are a courageous king," he said. "You have suffered a lot, but why? Are you trying to gain an even higher position and greater wealth? What do you want in return?"

"I don't want anything except the Buddhist law for my people," answered the king.

"Do you regret having nails pierce your body?" asked Sakra.

"Not at all," King Vilenjeli answered firmly. "If I can become a Buddha one day, I will be happy to sacrifice my body."

"How can I believe that you don't have the slightest regret for what you have done?"

King Vilenjeli said calmly, "If I am regretful, I'll never comprehend the Buddhist doctrine. If I have the slightest regret, let my body recover and become as healthy as ever before."

Hardly had he finished his oath, when King Vilenjeli's body recovered completely.

The Brahman Raudrakasa slipped out of the palace as he watched this scene. The sky became very clear and bright. The happiness and the joyful greetings rose from the crowds.

94

Fuxi

East Ceiling, Cave 285, Western Wei Dynasty, 535-556

Fuxi was a great male spirit in ancient China, who is said to have created the world. His greatest achievement was the production of human life. It is said that he taught people how to make fire, fish, hunt and farm. Though Dunhuang artwork originated from Buddhism subjects, it also contained some figures from Daoism and Chinese traditional myths. Therefore, Fuxi and Nuwa's figures appear in the Dunhuang murals.

It is said that Fuxi and Nüwa used to be cousins. They were reluctant to marry at first, but because of their marriage, human beings came into the world.

Long, long ago, the ordinary people living on the earth were well fed and well clothed, living a nonchalant life. As time went by, they all became lazy and unpure in heart. One day, god and his goddess in heaven came to the world in person to inspect human's virtues. They changed into dirty old men wearing shabby clothes and begged for food. People would rather use cake to wipe dung than feed the beggars, and they asked dogs to bite them. God was seething with anger, "Why do we keep these despicable creatures living?" He decided to kill the human beings when he returned to his palace. He commanded Wind, Rain and Thunder, three spirits, to descend to the earth, blowing fierce wind, falling with torrential rain and terrifying sounds. Immediately, wind destroyed the entire house, the earth was covered by deep floods, and people were killed by the thunder and lightning. Fierce wind and floods followed the people wherever they ran to. In three days, the earth was cleared of all people.

However, human beings didn't die completely. The only two survivors were the cousins Fuxi and Nüwa.

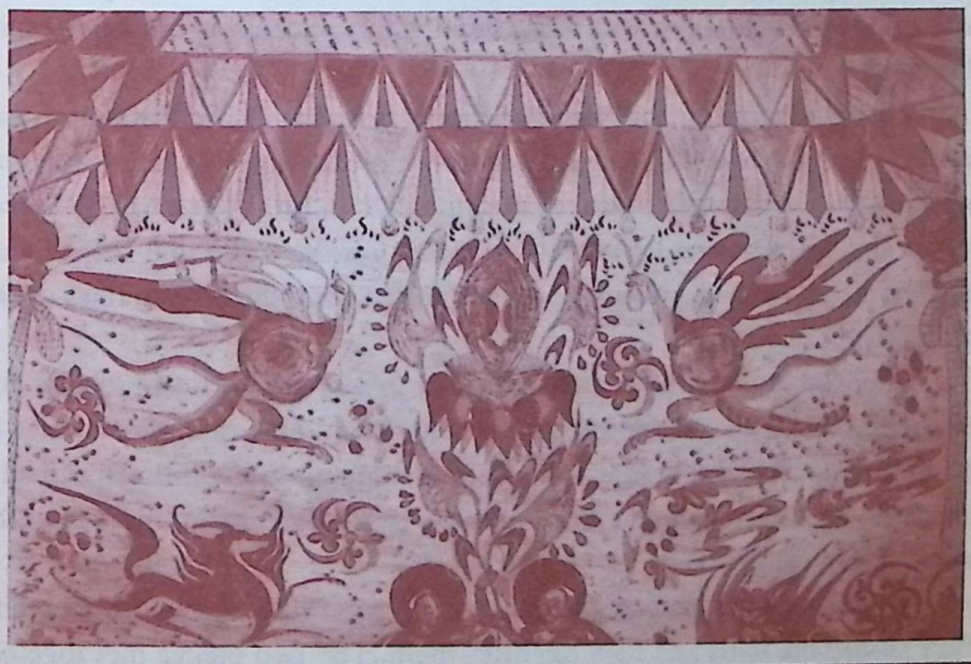
Fuxi and Nüwa were originally kind and industrious human beings, who often helped the poor people. At one time, a spirit had come to the earth and received their help. Once he discovered that god planned on killing the human

beings, he was very worried and went to the earth secretly. He changed himself into a beggar and visited their home begging for food. The cousins warmly received him and gave him warm clothes and money. The spirit realized that the cousins hadn't lost their virtues, so he decided to help them survive. As he left them, he handed the shabby begging basket to the cousins and said, "You two are the only nice people on earth. Remember, once the flood and fierce winds come, sit in the basket and you will be safe."

Taking the basket, Fuxi prepared to refuse the gift. But the beggar disappeared. The cousins promptly worshiped and appreciated the spirit.

Days later, fierce wind and floods came as expected. The earth became a vast ocean of water. The cousins sat in the basket and fled for their lives. No matter how fierce the wind was, and no matter how strong the waves were, the basket could not be overturned. Three days later, the flood gradually subsided and Fuxi and Nüwa were safe.

When Fuxi and Nüwa walked out of the basket, they looked around and found no other survivors. They decided to make some people out of mud and water to habitate the earth.



At that moment, the goddess of the earth came to stop them furiously exclaiming, "Stop, Stop making human beings out of mud."

"Why?" asked Fuxi and Nüwa.

"The earth is my body. If you dig the earth and make the human beings out of mud, it is like cutting meat off my body and blood. Don't you realize that?"

"Human beings have all drowned. Without human beings, how can the earth live?"

"That is easy," the goddess of the earth looked at the cousins and said, "As long as you two get married, you can give birth to human beings."

Nüwa blushed with shyness when she heard that and then ran away.

Fuxi thought about it, and though he didn't like the idea, he talked about it with his cousin. However, Nüwa didn't agree with it. They talked about it over and over for seven days and nights. At last, Nüwa said to Fuxi, "Let us do it. I will run in front of you, once you catch up to me, I will marry you." Fuxi agreed to her request.

Fuxi chased Nüwa. Nüwa ran around a very big mountain and she was very fast. Then Fuxi could not catch up with her. A turtle watching came up with an idea and then talked with Fuxi, "Fuxi, why not chase her in the opposite direction?"

Then Fuxi turned in the other direction. Immediately, he met with Nüwa face to face and then held her tightly. Because of the turtle's idea, Nüwa was caught and hated him very much, so she stomped on him. The turtle shell was broken and the turtle cried. Fuxi felt sympathy for the turtle that helped him, and then picked up the broken shell to fix it. Even now, the broken lines on the turtle's shell can be seen.

After fixing the turtle's shell, he asked to marry his cousin. Nuwa dismissed his request because of the turtle's help and still refused. She pointed to two millstones and said, "Let us take the millstone up to the hill respectively, and push them down from the top. Once the two stones meet together at the bottom, I will marry you."

Then, Fuxi took a stone, Nüwa took the other and climbed up the hill. They pushed the mills and then ran after them. The two pieces met together

down the hill, and Nüwa fulfilled her promise and married Fuxi.

One hundred days after they married, Nüwa gave birth to a baby that had a terrible deformity and would never develop into a person. Fuxi regarded it as disgusting and slashed it wildly. Pieces splashed all round and became many human beings. They became 50 males and 50 females. They were lively and happily playing with each other. Some ran to the riverside, some climbed up the trees, and some rode on the backs of livestocks. The Fuxi cousins gave the humans their surnames based on where they played. Those who played on the riverside were named "He" (River), those who climbed up the peach trees were named "Tao" (Peach), those who rode on the horseback were named "Ma" (Horse) and so on. This is why we now have the hundred common family surnames. Thus, human beings came to live on the earth again.

Translated by Zhang Ming

95

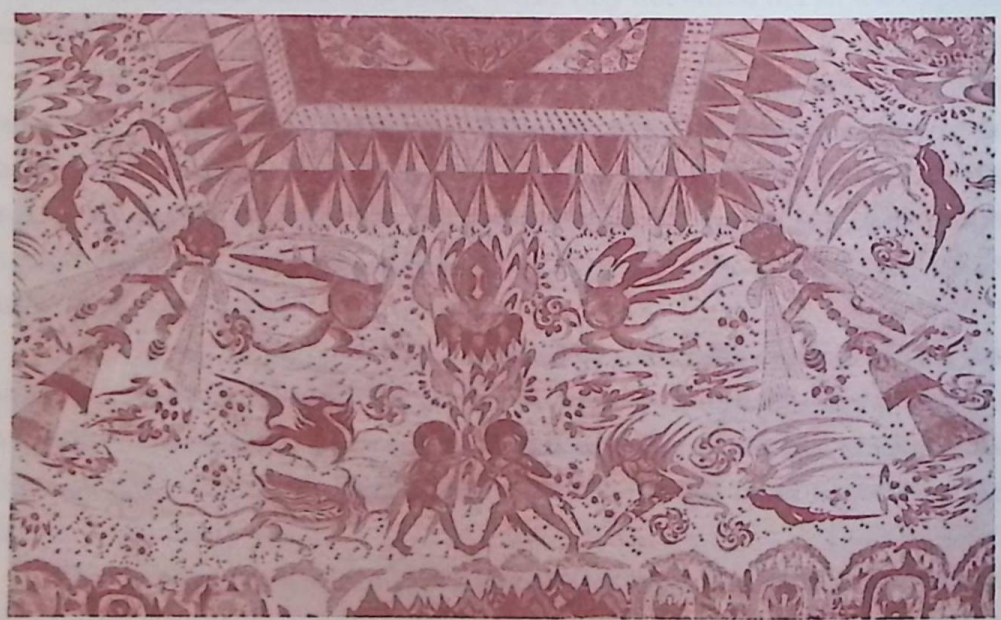
Nuwa

East Ceiling, Cave 285, Western Wei Dynasty, 535-556

Nuwa is one of the most respectable female spirits in Chinese legendary history. In myth, Nuwa is famous for her prowess at being able to patch the sky, create human beings and transform into many things. She was once regarded as one of the spirits that created the world respected and worshiped by people for centuries. People have called her the "Nuwa Goddess". Nuwa's portrait also appeared in the Dunhuang murals.

It is said that Pangu opened the heaven and created the earth, but died after he created life on earth.

There was a beautiful female spirit named Nuwa who came to heaven and earth created by Pangu. In the new world, there were high majestic mountains



and great flowing rivers. Fowl and beasts lived peacefully and happily together.

However, as time went by, Nuwa found that plants and animals were not intelligent at all. Fowls and beasts fought with each other to be lords of the earth. She decided to use her power to create beings to manage them. Nuwa went to the riverside of the Yellow River, a place once regarded as the cradle of the earth. She sat down and dug out a piece of earth, molded it with her hands, and then made a clay figure as she imitated her physical appearance reflected on the water surface. She then put the figure on the earth. The figure immediately became a baby once its feet touched the earth, called Nuwa "mama" and jumped about happily.

Nuwa continued to mold clay babies. The little clay children were able to talk and walk as they came to birth from Nuwa's hands. As all the babies talked and cried around her, Nuwa didn't feel lonely any more.

Nuwa continuously made the clay figures from the Yellow River clay. However, the world itself was too big. Though she tirelessly made the human beings for days and nights, scattering them throughout the wide and lengthy land, the human beings were still too few. Nuwa soon decided to find a way to make more human beings.

One afternoon, Nuwa was tired of molding babies and decided to take a break under the shade of the cliff. At that moment, a cool wind blew, and the falling canes under the cliff waved in the wind. Nuwa noticed this and came up with an idea. She tore off a piece of cane and went to the riverside and dipped it into the water, stirred the yellow mud with her magic power, and then threw the cane with the mud to the bank. The mud immediately became babies.

Nuwa was extremely happy and continued to make humans by throwing the mud from the canes. Thousands of new people were born this way. Soon afterwards, traces of humanity were found all over the world.

Though happy seeing the humans she had made living on the earth, Nuwa soon had new worries. What if one day humans died? How could she keep them alive on the earth forever? She thought about this over and over, then came up with an idea. She said to the human beings, "Though you have lives, men and women must marry to be couples to multiply and feed the descendants if human beings want to exist on the earth forever." Hence, men and women got

married to give birth to babies and will be happily living in the world.

It was not known how much time went by before Nuwa found that humans only knew how to live basic lives, satisfying their most primitive needs. They did not know how to create joy for themselves through wisdom. Therefore, Nuwa invented many instruments and taught human to play. She also invented dancing and taught them to sing and dance. People played music after working; men and women sang and danced with the beautiful music and they lived a happy life, free from all anxieties.

Translated by Zhang Ming

96

Cousins Worshiped the Three Treasures

South Wall, Cave 285, Western Wei Dynasty, 535-556

A Buddha once lived together with 500 monks, helping to cultivate themselves in a cottage of bamboo in Rajagrha. One day, Moggallana, Kasyapa, Anuruddha, Pindola spoke with one another upon finishing Buddhist scriptures. Moggallana said, "To spread the Buddhist power, make it well known to all people. It is our duty to make more people living in Rajagrha worship Buddha, the law, and the monks as three. According to what we've experienced through begging, let us enlighten those who do not believe in Buddhism and guide them through example."

Kasyapa said, "A senior named Hua Boti lives in this city. He has a plethora of treasures at home. He is mean and never donates or worships Buddha, the law, or monks. There are seven gates around his house guarded by attendants. Beggars are not permitted to enter. Moreover, a layer of iron net is strung over the top of the yard in order to keep birds from looking for food. His past life's fortune is going to be exhausted very soon. Let us go and cultivate him."

All nodded and agreed with this idea.

One morning, as Hua Boti was having breakfast, Anuruddha appeared from the underneath of his house holding a bowl and begging for food. Hua Boti became angry and his face looked sad. He broke off half a pastry then sent him away. When Anuruddha left, Hua Boti became furious and scolded the guard.

"I told you before. Do not allow anyone to come while I am having a meal. Why did you allow the monk to enter?"

The guard felt sad and said, "All the gates actually are closed tightly, I've never opened them. Nobody knows how the monk came in."

At noontime while Hua Boti ate with great relish, Kasyapa appeared from the underneath of his house again and begged for food with a bowl in his hand. Hua Boti was reluctant to throw the fish tail in his bowl and urged him to leave. When Kasyapa left, the senior was more furious and shouted to the guard, "God damn you, why did you allow the second monk to enter?"

The noise disturbed his wife and she came to find out what happened. Hua Boti cried out furiously,"The bold monk is good at magic and behaves badly to puzzle people."

His wife stopped him.

"Husband, let us talk about this indoors." His wife knew much about Buddha and believed in Buddhism. She pushed her husband into the room.

"Don't be angry, and don't abuse monks. Those two monks obviously have special powers. This is due to your past life merits that they came to our house to beg from you. Do you know who they are?"

"I don't know. Tell me."

"The first monk is Anuruddha. He used to be the second son of King Suklodana of Kapilavastu. When he was born, the earth shook. When he grew up, he became a monk and followed Buddhism. He cultivated himself industriously and received arhat and has been praised by the Buddha.

"I've heard of him, but have never seen him."

"Husband, have you heard of another rich senior living in the city?"

"I know there is Big Kasyapa living in the city, but I've never met him."

"The second monk who begged before you is Big Kasyapa. He left his wife to learn Buddhism and gained arhat, as he always wore Dhuta. The Buddha praised him as 'the number one Dhuta.' As two sages begged for food from you, you'll have to answer one day for your mean and slanderous behavior."

Hua Boti felt guilty but still reluctant to admit his mistakes. So he said, "I don't believe in Buddhism and retribution."

As sunset, the evening glow shone all over the sky. Moggallana was flying with his bowl in his hands. He used his powers to tear off the iron net on the top of the yard and sat cross-legged in the sky. Hua Boti was scared while watching the scene, and asked him, "Are you a spirit?"

"No, I am not a spirit."

"Are you a ghost?"

"No, I am not a ghost."

"Who are you?"

"I am the follower of the Buddha, Moggallana."

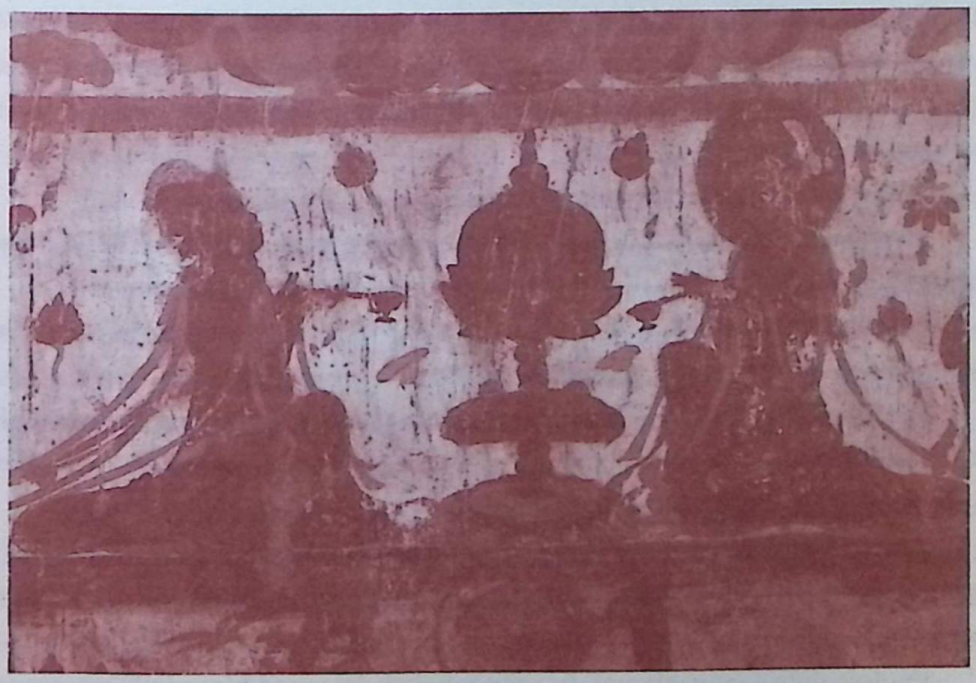
"You've respectively visited my house. Do you have any instructions?"

"Senior, I am coming to prepare you for Buddhism. You should think things over after learning."

Hua Boti thought to himself, "If this monk begs for food, I will tell him there was no food since dinner was over and ask him to leave right away. If I want to cultivate his Buddhism, I will learn from him."

Through his own wisdom, Moggallana was able to guess Hua Boti's intentions. He said to him, "The Buddha says there are two kinds of donations, donations of law and donations of wealth. I will talk about donations of law. Please pay attention."

Hua Boti was very happy when he learned there was no need to donate money and said, "Respected one, please talk about donations of law, I would



like to hear it."

"There are five kinds of laws of donation which should be kept for your whole life. First, do not take life. Second, do not steal. Third, do not fornicate outside of your home. Fourth, do not deceive. Fifth, do not drink."

"If I follow those five items, can I become cultivated?" asked Hua Boti.

"You can do it yourself," Moggallana answered.

Hua Boti thought to himself, "What the Buddha said is perfect. I can cultivate myself without donating any money. It suits me well. I can promise not to take life. I will not steal from others since I have a lot of property. I can follow that one. I will not sleep with others since I have my wife and many concubines at home. I despise lies and deception and will not talk nonsense. I never drink. I can also follow that one."

So Hua Boti said to Moggallana, "Respected one, I can follow those five items. Please come down and sit to receive my donations."

Moggallana accepted the invitation and flew onto the ground, and sat properly in the room. Hua Boti served him all kinds of vegetarian food and they enjoyed dinner together. When Moggallana finished the meal, he spoke of the Four Essences (suffering, origination, cessation, and path) in life and asked him to eradicate the greedy desires in Form, Vedana, Conception, Samskara, and Consciousnesses, in other words the Five Skandhas. You must cultivate your heart and soul and avoid greediness.

"All right, I agree with your requests."

Moggallana went back to the cottage in the bamboo groves after having finished his words.

One morning, Pindola took his bowl and directly went to senior Hua Boti's home. His wife happened to be making bread.

Pindola bowed and said, "Dear benefactor, please give me a piece of bread for my breakfast."

He then reached out to offer his bowl.

Senior's wife became angry and pushed away the bowl, saying, "Go away, monk. It is my bad luck to have you here begging early in the morning. I will not give you any bread."

Pindola didn't leave though he was refused. He used his magic power to

spread out a blast of smoke and said, "Dear benefactor, please give me a piece of bread."

"Well, I won't give you it even if you catch fire, to say nothing of your smoke."

"Dear benefactor, please, please give me a piece of bread. Look, I have fire round my body."

Then his body emitted a flame.

"Well, I won't give you any even if you hang your head downwards, to say nothing of your fire."

"Dear benefactor, please give me a piece of bread," the monk said hanging his head.

"Well, hanging downwards in the air, you've got yourself all mixed up. It does not involve me. Don't try to eat half of my bread," the senior's wife said fiercely.

Pindola thought to himself, "Senior's wife is incredibly mean and stubborn. If I don't pressure her, she will not worship Buddhism." So he flew away from Rajagrha and found a piece of huge stone. He sat on it and used his magic power to fly to Rajagrha with the stone. People in the wide streets and narrow lanes all over the city panicked when they saw the huge stone flying in the sky. They became frightened and ran away because they were afraid of being hurt by the huge falling stone.

Pindola sat on the huge stone and flew on the top of the lady's house, shouting, "Dear benefactor, please give me a piece of bread."

The lady heard the voice and came out. She was frightened and trembled as she saw the stone covering the whole sky. She worried about the huge stone falling down and her house being smashed. Then she implored, "Dear respected one, do not throw down the stone. If you remove the huge stone right away, I will give you bread. I promise."

Then Pindola put the stone back to the ground and returned to Rajagrha. The lady invited Pindola into her house, but she was reluctant to bring him the bread. She originally wanted to bring one piece and leave the rest for herself. But when she took one piece of bread, she found that all the pieces were linked together. She had to take them all with her.

Pindola had one piece of bread. Then he began showing the lady all kinds of secret recipes, talking about the Three Understandings, Six Theurgies, Eight Reliefs, and the Twelve Fates for Lovers. The lady learned and began to feel ashamed of what she had done before. She was determined to worship the Three Treasures. She asked, "Dear respected one, I would appreciate it if you helped me worship the Buddhism and realize my errors. Though I have already completely ridden myself of greediness, how should I express my heart and soul to the Buddha?"

Pindola replied, "You can make more bread to worship the Buddha and help his followers."

The lady asked others to help her make baskets of bread immediately, and carried them to the cottage of bamboo groves.

As the Buddha continued to teach the lady, she was released from her errors and crimes. Afterwards she enjoyed all riches and honors in the world and lived for 33 days after her death.

Translated by Zhang Ming

97

Evil Ox Turned to Be Good

South Wall, Cave 285, Western Wei Dynasty, 535-556

Long ago, Tathagata the Buddha once preached Buddhist doctrinces in the country called Kosala. With his teaching and different predestined causes, the people learned the Buddhist truth and more and more people came to him and gathered around him. One day, when he was walking with some disciples to another place to preach, they came across a beautiful lake. The lake water was so clear that you could see to the bottom and the green and lush grasses and bushes were everywhere. The fresh flowers were in full bloom, and the people were immediately intoxicated by the beautiful landscape.

A herd of cattle and a flock of sheep were on the slopes of the mountains grazing. The shepherds were whistling while cracking the whips.

At that moment, one herdsman saw a group of people marching across the grassland and they came up and said, "Amitabha, please go by a roundabout route, do not walk across this piece of grassland."

"Why not? This is the only shortcut," said the Buddha.

"I told you that with the best of intentions," the herdsman said. "Look at the five hundred oxen. Among them there is a ferocious and brutal ox. As soon as it meets strangers, it becomes raving mad and it uses its horn to hurt people. No one can stop it from doing so. Many strangers have been killed or badly hurt by its wildness. To tell you the truth, you will be dripping with blood if you meet it." The herdsman advised them. "You'd better go by a different route or the consequences would be disastrous."

"Thank you very much for your kindness," the Buddha said. "Don't worry about us. I have vanquished all kinds of demons and ghosts. I know how to deal with it and I'll take this opportunity to eliminate this pest for the people."

Suddenly, somebody shouted, "Look out! The evil ox is coming!"

The evil ox from the other side of the grassland was charging towards them wildly. The ox with ferocious features was strong and robust and its horns were like two sharp swords. It opened its bloody mouth, dashing around madly. All the herdsmen closed their eyes to avoid seeing the miserable scene.

However, the Buddha kept calm. He closed his eyes and smoothly stretched his left arm, then opened his hands, and immediately the incarnations of the five lions showed up. These five lions were full of power and grandeur and it seemed that the lions were determined to topple the mountains and overturn the seas. The Buddha then stretched out his right arm and raging flames burned fiercely all around the ox. The ox was at a loss at what to do. So it turned and wanted to escape, but the raging flames chased the ox.

The ox ran desperately, became exhausted and dropped onto the ground panting deeply. The Buddha took back his supernatural power and the five lions disappeared and the raging flames died out. Buddha then began to teach the ox Buddhist scriptures and the law. He clearly lectured the three insights, the Four Noble Truths, the six supernatural powers and the eight stages of mental concentration. Hearing the Buddha's teaching, the ox understood that all living creatures should observe the Buddhist disciplines and do good deeds in hope of being born in the realm of heavens after their deaths.

After listening to Buddha's preaching, the ox was heavyhearted and lost

in thought. Several days later, the ox died.

On the date of the ox's death, a flaming ball fell down from heaven, and all the cowsheds, the houses and the sheets shone just like daytime. The next day, when the Buddha preached the doctrines to the herdsmen, they told him what they had seen and asked the Buddha whether the Four Guardian Kings came down from the heaven to catch the evil ox.

"Not exactly. Last night, the evil ox was changed from evil to good and was going to heaven—the Pure Land and I helped the ox release his soul from purgatory and realize the truth. I again preached Buddhist doctrine to the ox. When Brahman learned this, he came down from the heaven to observe the scene, and the whole country was brightly lit."

Five hundred herdsmen suddenly saw the light and paid lots of respect to the Buddha.

From that time on, the herdsmen regularly joined the preaching of the Buddha and they read Buddhist scriptures, enshirine and worship the Buddha. They understood the truth that all living beings would surely be saved out of the misery of life, age, illness and death and transferred to the Pure Land. They achieved a lot from the teachings. Finally, they shaved their heads, wore Buddhist garments, practiced Buddhist teachings wholeheartedly and made progress every day.

With the help of the Buddha, they all achieved the fruit of arhat and 500 herdsmen became 500 arhats.

98

How Five Hundred Bandits Became Buddhists

South Wall, Cave 285, Western Wei Dynasty, 535-556

Legend has it that the king of the State of Magadha was a tyrant, and that the people of Magadha suffered a great deal as a result of natural disasters and human iniquities. Some of the people fled their native land in search of a better life. Some were reduced to begging, and many died, their bodies were left to rot in the streets. Some could no longer tolerate the situation so they banded together in rebellion and became known as the Five Hundred. They robbed the wealth of the riches and redistributed their booty of food and clothing among the poor, saving countless people from starvation and want.

The local officials denounced the Five Hundred as criminals and bandits and ordered the militia to capture them. But their efforts were in vain; the soldiers could not capture the Five Hundred. As a last resort, the local officials appealed to the king for assistance.

At first the king was frightened when he heard how powerful the bandits were. But he pulled himself together and selected the boldest, most powerful troops and his most experienced generals and ordered them to conquer the bandits.

The Five Hundred fought a fierce and bloody battle but could not withstand the well-trained, selected army. Defeated, the Five Hundred were rounded up and escorted to a remote area in the thickly forested mountains, where they were cruelly tortured. Using sharp knives, the soldiers gouged out the eyes of each of the Five Hundred.

The quiet mountain valley resounded with the shrieks, screams and pitiful crying of the sightless bandits. Terrified by the horrible noise, all the animals — the birds and deer, the tigers and wolves — ran away. In their blind

helplessness, the bandits ran here and there, violently colliding with one another, stumbling and falling.

"Heavens, gods, please help us," they cried out miserably, their despair echoing across the heavens.

Now, one of the bandits was a Buddhist. He advised his fellow bandits to pray to Buddha for help. So, with one voice, the Five Hundred called out to the Goddess of Mercy.

Their grievous cry was so loud that the goddess heard them. Suddenly, a wild wind shook the trees and Sakyamuni, riding a big elephant, descended into the valley.

"Stop crying," he said gently, "I am here to help you out of your abyss of misery. I know that circumstances compelled you to become bandits and that it was not a life you freely chose. Thus, I am ready to help you enter Sukhavati, the Pure Land."

As he spoke, Sakyamuni placed a fragrant panacea in the palm of his hand and blew it into the eyes of the Five Hundred. Miraculously, their eyes stopped bleeding and their sight was restored. Now the valley echoed with joyful noises and gaiety as the Five Hundred fell to their knees to thank Sakyamuni.

From that time on, the Five Hundred devoted themselves to the study of Buddhism and after many years they became known as the Five Hundred Arahats, or disciples of Buddha.

99

Prince Susambhava Cut Flesh to Save His Parents

North Wall, Cave 296, Northern Zhou Dynasty, 557-581

Long long ago, there was a large country named Varanasi. The king had ten sons who ruled over ten small kingdoms. The king had a favorite minister named Rahu who was in charge of the military forces. Seeing that the king was aged, he evilly intended to usurp the throne. He attacked the capital city, slew the king, and sent troops to the ten kingdoms to kill the princesses.

The king's youngest son was on the farthest border of the country. He was a kindhearted, handsome and upright young man and very kind and gentle to his people. Like his father, he governed his own kingdom successfully. He had a son called Susambhava, upright, sedate, and loyal to his parents. He was loved by his parents since he was clever and good-looking.

The youngest prince was unware of what had happened to their families. However, Rahu was ready to attack his kingdom. The deity of the palaces told him, "Your father was murdered by the minister Rahu and he is now leading 100,000 soldiers coming to our kingdom in three days. Don't hesitate any more, escape! Rahu wanted to kill all your family members."

The prince followed his advice and decided to run to the neighboring country.

There were two ways to get to the neighboring country. One way was a shortcut that took seven days, and the other was flat and long and would take fourteen days. Fleeing in confusion, they went the long way.

No water could be found on the way because the road crossed a stretch of desolate land. And what was worse, their food had been eaten up in the first few days. There was still a long way to go and death was threatening them. Their

legs were shaking and they could not support themselves any longer. The concubine collapsed first, and then the prince. The little son gasped and suffered the torture of thirst and hunger. Seeing how his concubine and son were suffering, the prince felt a piercing pain in his heart. He realized that death was drawing near.

The prince crept to the pond and drank some dirty water. Then he thought. "If we do not find a solution, the three of us will starve to death." An idea occurred to him. He wanted to kill his concubine to save his son and himself by eating her flesh. He pulled out his knife and was about to take action when Susambhava saw this and judged his intention. He crawled forth, held his father's legs and tried to persuade him,"No, no, you can't do that, Father King. You can not kill my mother!"

"If I do not kill her, neither of us will survive," said the king.

"I wouldn't eat my own mother's flesh even if you killed her. Why don't

you kill me to save you and my mother? You are more important than I. Please kill me instead."

Tears filled the prince's eyes. He was in a dilemma.

Susambhava suddenly hit an idea, "Father King, there is still a long way to the neighboring country. Look! The flesh will rot under the burning sun. You do not have to kill neither my mother nor me. The solution is to cut three pieces of meat off my body each day. Each of us can have a piece so that we can have fresh meat every day. This way, the three of us all can survive."

No sooner had he finished his words than Susambhave cut off the flesh from his body. He presented the flesh to his parents and they ate it with tears. They moved on. Day after day, the neighboring country was closer, but the flesh of Susambhava was completely cut off. What remained were the bones and muscles and joints. He could not move on any longer. He picked off what was left on the bare bones, divided it into three parts, gave his parents two and told them to eat on the way ahead.

They parted bitterly. Susambhava tried to stand up but in vain. He could not support himself any more and fell flat on the ground.

That day, Trayastrimsa (the highest level of heaven) that was resided by Sakra-devanam-indra trembled. Sakra came down to the man's world and saw with his own eyes that Susambhave had saved his parents with his flesh and blood. His virtue and benevolence had showed his worthiness of being lifted to heaven. In order to test Susambhava again, Sakra disguised as a skinny lion, pounced on him roaring, "I'm starving to death, let me eat your flesh!"

"There is no flesh left on my body. I am willing to give my bones to you in order to make you stay alive." Sakra was moved to tears and told him, "I am the emperor of the heaven and I come disguised as a lion in order to test you. How kind you are! You endured the various pains and miseries to save your parents and the hungry lion. Weren't you regretful?"

"I have no regrets at all."

"How do you prove that you haven't told a lie?"

The young prince swore, "Let me die right away if I have deceived the emperor of the heavens and let me recover and return to my former self if what I have said is true."

No sooner had he finished saying that than Susambhara became healthy, handsome and dignified. "Now I believe you," said Sakra. "I am sure you will succeed and become a Buddha." With those words he disappeared.

Susambhava quickly arrived in the neighboring country. The parents told the neighboring king about the rebellion of Rahu and the sacrifice of Susambhava, The king was very much sympathetic with the prince and was greatly amazed at his son's filial piety. He put his own troops at the prince's disposal to send a punitive expedition against the rebel Rahu.

The troops broke all enemy resistance, killed Rahu and recovered the throne. The whole country was immersed in great joy and happiness and supported Susambhava as their king.

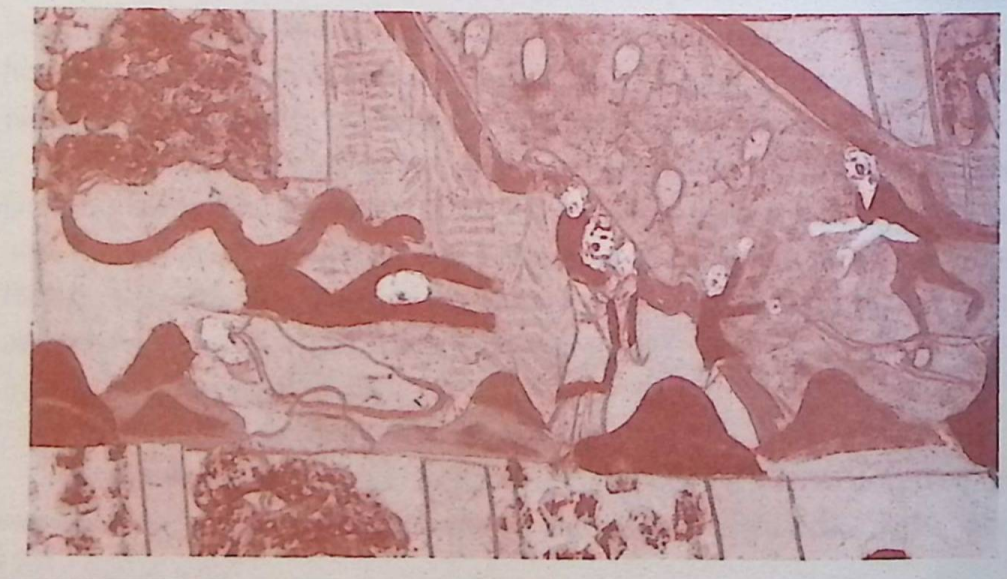
100

The Sufferings of Patacara the Bhiksuni

Cave 296, Northern Zhou Dynasty, 557-581

Patacara the Bhiksuni was born in an educated Brahman family in the kingdom of Rajagrha in ancient India. Her father was an extremely rich and powerful noble man. There was another Brahman scholar in the country and he had an intelligent and handsome son. When the scholar learned of the beauty of Patacara, he told her father that his son wanted to marry her.

The young couple met and fell in love. The lucky date was chosen and they married. They had one son. When she was about to have a second child, Patacara decided to give birth in her parents' home. She got permission from her husband and they hurried to see her parents.



Half way to their destination, she began to have labor pains, and her husband helped her to the shade of a tree. They got everything ready for childbirth.

At midnight, her water broke. A huge poisonous snake smelled the blood and crawled towards them. Her husband was too tired to notice the snake and he was killed. She was so frightened that she lost consciousness. When the elder son found his father dead on the ground, he burst into tears and his cries awakened Patacara. With tears in their eyes, they continued their journey.

They now came to a large river. It had been a shallow river, but that day it was deep and wide. She asked the elder son to stay on the riverbank and wait for her return. Then she carried the newborn baby across the river. But just as she was about to come back and fetch the elder son, he jumped into the water and waved at her, motioning her not to come back to get him because he could manage himself. Unfortunately, he was swept away by the water. Patacara struggled violently in the water, attempting in vain to save him. Frantically, she hurried back to the newborn baby, but it had already been carried away by a hungry wolf. Having lost all three, she fainted.

As Patacara was walking slowly by herself towards her parents' house, she ran into an aged scholar who was her father's good friend.

"You look terribly pale. What has happened to you?" the old man asked.

Patacara told him about her misfortunes and then she inquired about her parents, but the noble man sighed in despair, "Something very terrible happened to your parents. Their house caught fire and they couldn't escape. They were burned alive."

Suddenly, she saw a murky sky over the dark earth. Another heavy blow, like tons of bricks, fell upon her head. She fainted. The old man tried to awaken her. As soon as she regained consciousness, the old man invited her to his home. He had great sympathy for her misfortunes, and he treated her as if she were his own daughter. His son thought she was beautiful and asked her to be his wife. She had no choice and they married.

Her new husband turned out to be an alcoholic. One day at midnight, he

returned home, very drunk. That night Patacara was about to give birth when suddenly he broke into the room and dragged her out of the bed, beating, and scolding her. The baby, however, was born. But instead of calming down, he became angrier and killed the baby. The scene was so tragic that she could not bear it. She thought she was very unfortunate to have been married to such a beast, so she ran away the next day.

She eventually arrived in the kingdom of Varanasi. She rested in the shade of a big tree near a graveyard. A handsome young man approached her from the graveyard and told her his misfortunes.

"My wife died a few days ago. Everyday I come here to mourn her death in the graveyard since we loved each other very much," the young man said in a low voice.

Patacara, in turn, told him all the misfortunes she had suffered. The young man was shocked and was very sympathetic towards her.

"We have both suffered. Please come with me. I will take good care of you."

So Patacara followed him. Their misfortunes brought them together and later they married and loved each other dearly. However, not long after they married, the man was suddenly seized with a severe illness and died without saying a word. According to the custom of his region, the wife and the pets of the dead person were buried along with him. So she was buried alive to be her husband's companion in the afterlife.

Quite by coincidence a gang of robbers came to the graveyard the very same night. They unearthed the coffin and Patacara was saved. Attracted by her beauty, the bandit chief forced her to be his wife.

Several days later, the bandit was captured and executed. She again had to bury a husband and again was buried alive to accompany him. She remained in the grave for three days until a pack of wolves happened to pass by, smelling the fresh meat, dug out the grave. Patacara had a fierce fight with the wolves, but she lived and was free again. She ran to a safe place.

"Oh, my beloved Buddha, how I wish I could see you. How unfortunate I am! Why can't I have a place to shelter myself ? And what crimes did I commit? What shall I do to save the rest of my life?"As she pondered her plight, she heard echoing voices imploring her to go to see Sakyamuni. She put on her clothes and headed straight to the place where Gautama lived. She became a Bhiksuni and was called Patacara the Bhiksuni by later generations.

101

King Sudhira Gave His Eyes Away

Cave 302, Northern Liang Dynasty, 397-445

Sudhira was the king of a country called Pudgarava. Since he had a pair of sharp and bright eyes, people called him Sudhira for respect. King Sudhira was well known for his benevolence and virtuousness. He was esteemed and supported by his own people and also enjoyed high prestige among the subordinate countries.

One day, King Sudhira sat in the palace thinking, "I am the king of the country now, wealthy and respected, but the wealth does not grow. It will be used up sooner or later. In order to have people remember my merits and virtues, I should help and save the poor and give my wealth to my people." So he told his ministers to open the national treasury and give all the gold, silver, grain and clothing in charity. He issued an order for people to come and take whatever they needed. Meanwhile, the people from all the small kingdoms came to share the wealth. Another small country far away from Pudgarava was ruled by a king called Bradabhami. He was rude and arrogant, wallowing in luxury and pleasure. He did whatever he liked. He extorted excessive taxes and levies, forced thousands of people to serve him. Day after day, year after year, the country was becoming ruined. People were living in dire poverty. Complaints and cries were heard everywhere.

One day, a minister called Raudraksa ran the risk of his life to plead to the king. He said, "Your Majesty, people cannot bear the heavy burden of our taxes and many of them have gone to other countries for shelter, and the taxes are getting heavier these years while prices go up daily. I beseech Your Majesty to correct these mistakes." The king hit the ceiling when he heard that an ordinary minister even dared to blame him. How he wished to chop the man into pieces,

but he held back his anger. He thought, "This minister is very much different from the other ministers. He is respected by both ordinary people and the officials in palace. If I kill him now, there would be greater trouble. Let me wait for a few days." So he pretended to be generous and said, "I understand you. I won't blame you. I'll take what you said for special consideration." With these words he left casually.

Clever Raudraksa knew clearly that it was because of his fame and influence in the country that this fatuous and self-indulgent ruler did not kill him. So he quickly ran away from the country and arrived at the capital of Pudgarava. He asked King Sukhira for an army to punish and kill the evil ruler.

After the conversation, the king found that Raudraksa was intelligent, well learned, and full of military strategies, so he appointed him one of his ministers. King Sudhira issued an order to ask the subordinate countries to join the battle.

When the evil king learned this news, he regretted not killing Raudraksa earlier. He ordered his troops to resist, but the soldiers were in low spirits and

were defeated easily. Before long, the city was under siege. Raudraksa waited outside for the evil king to surrender. He was in a disasterous situation and was as restless as ants on a hot pan. He called his minister together to discuss the terrible situation. Most of the ministers knew quite well that he was a cruel and brutal king and consequently collaborated with Raudraksa secretly, so they just kept silence. However, among them, there was a cunning and snobbish minister. He went up to the king and said, "Your Majesty, I am told that King Sudhira once swore that he would give everything to those who wanted. Why don't we find a blind man and ask the king to donate his eyes? King Sudhira is a man of his words and we can take advantage of it and make Sudhira blind. Once he is blind, his troops will certainly withdraw. In this way, we will bring about a radical change in the situation."

The evil king was excited and soon a blind Brahman was found. The blind Brahman accepted the mission.

When the blind Brahman reached the capital city of Pudgarava, he went straight to the royal palace. He shouted, "I was told that King Sudhira is kind-hearted and virtuous. I come from a distant place and ask Your Majesty for aid."

King Sudhira came out immediately and greeted the blind Brahman, "I will give you whatever you need."

"I have been in the dark world for many years. How I wish I could see the light," he said sincerely, "Your Majesty swore that you would give anything, so I want your eyes. I will die if I do not have your eyes."

King Sukhira answered calmly, "I will certainly satisfy your need. It is my pleasure to relieve people's sufferings but be patient. You have to wait for seven days since I have to handle some important affairs."

"Your Majesty, you are my saver," exclaimed the blind Brahman, "Your oath seems to have given me a pair of bright eyes already and has made me see the bright happiness in the near future."

It was unbelievable for all the ministers. They all were stupefied by his words and tried to persuade him to correct his decision.

"I swore before the blind Brahman that I would give him my eyes in seven days," The king said calmly. "I will not break my promise, so let us deal with the state affairs first."

The king's eldest son, Prince Silabhadra, begged him again and again not to give his eyes to the Brahman. "Please give my eyes to him instead, father." He said, "Father, if you lose your eyes, how would the people rely on you?" However, nobody could change his mind. He addressed the crowed happily, "I give my clear and wise eyes to the people now and I will certainly receive from the Buddha eyes of wisdom. What I am doing now is to realize my wish. So, please do not stand in my way."

Seven days passed. The king got everything ready and ordered the guards to take his eyes out. All the people in the palace held their breath or covered their faces. It was deadly still. The king ordered the guard to cut the eyes out. The guard cut the eye and took one eye out and put it in the Brahman's hand, still dripping with blood. And then the king asked the guard to cut out the other eye. At this moment, the Brahman fell to his knees and cried out, "I have already got one of Your Majesty's eyes, and this is enough. Please keep the other for yourself. Your Majesty, if I'd known what was going to happen, I wouldn't have done as I did."

The Brahman implored the king to stop cutting the other eye. All the ministers, consorts and princes besought the king to have pity on them and not to give the other eye away.

"Listen to me, my subjects," the king swore again, "I help the blind with my own eyes in order to attain enlightenment. I must keep my promise." He ordered the guard to cut out the other eye. The king had the eyes fixed into the blind man's eye sockets and the Brahman saw light.

At this moment, the heaven and the earth quaked and palaces in the heavens trembled. The kings and gods of heaven flew down together, scattering various fragrant flowers around King Sudhira. The shower of praise and gasp of admiration of King Sudhira were echoed in the sky.

"It must have been painful when your eyes were being cut out. Are you regretful?" asked Sakra.

"No, not in the least. I want to obtain supreme wisdom in order that I can help humanity out of the ocean of misery and achieve the highest of goals.

"But how can you make me believe what you said?" asked Sakra.

"If what I have said is true and can be realized, let my eyes become as

were defeated easily. Before long, the city was under siege. Raudraksa waited outside for the evil king to surrender. He was in a disasterous situation and was as restless as ants on a hot pan. He called his minister together to discuss the terrible situation. Most of the ministers knew quite well that he was a cruel and brutal king and consequently collaborated with Raudraksa secretly, so they just kept silence. However, among them, there was a cunning and snobbish minister. He went up to the king and said, "Your Majesty, I am told that King Sudhira once swore that he would give everything to those who wanted. Why don't we find a blind man and ask the king to donate his eyes? King Sudhira is a man of his words and we can take advantage of it and make Sudhira blind. Once he is blind, his troops will certainly withdraw. In this way, we will bring about a radical change in the situation."

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The king's eldest son, Prince Silabhadra, begged him again and again not to give his eyes to the Brahman. "Please give my eyes to him instead, father." He said, "Father, if you lose your eyes, how would the people rely on you?" However, nobody could change his mind. He addressed the crowed happily, "I give my clear and wise eyes to the people now and I will certainly receive from the Buddha eyes of wisdom. What I am doing now is to realize my wish. So, please do not stand in my way."

Seven days passed. The king got everything ready and ordered the guards to take his eyes out. All the people in the palace held their breath or covered their faces. It was deadly still. The king ordered the guard to cut the eyes out. The guard cut the eye and took one eye out and put it in the Brahman's hand, still dripping with blood. And then the king asked the guard to cut out the other eye. At this moment, the Brahman fell to his knees and cried out, "I have already got one of Your Majesty's eyes, and this is enough. Please keep the other for yourself. Your Majesty, if I'd known what was going to happen, I wouldn't have done as I did."

The Brahman implored the king to stop cutting the other eye. All the ministers, consorts and princes besought the king to have pity on them and not to give the other eye away.

"Listen to me, my subjects," the king swore again, "I help the blind with my own eyes in order to attain enlightenment. I must keep my promise." He ordered the guard to cut out the other eye. The king had the eyes fixed into the blind man's eye sockets and the Brahman saw light.

At this moment, the heaven and the earth quaked and palaces in the heavens trembled. The kings and gods of heaven flew down together, scattering various fragrant flowers around King Sudhira. The shower of praise and gasp of admiration of King Sudhira were echoed in the sky.

"It must have been painful when your eyes were being cut out. Are you regretful?" asked Sakra.

"No, not in the least. I want to obtain supreme wisdom in order that I can help humanity out of the ocean of misery and achieve the highest of goals.

"But how can you make me believe what you said?" asked Sakra.

"If what I have said is true and can be realized, let my eyes become as

bright as before."

There came the miracle.

Hardly had he finished his words, when his eyesight was restored.

The evil king Bradabhami had been waiting anxiously for the return of the blind Brahman. Finally, the Brahman came back, but he did not bring the news Bradabhami had expected. The news he heard was how King Sudhira had cut out his eyes to help the blind Brahman and the restoration of his eyesight. The evil king was greatly disappointed and had no supporters. Later on the evil and ruthless king died in a miserable way.

102

Taming a Firedrake

West Wall, Cave 305, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

Once upon a time, there lived three Kasyapa brothers in the village beside papaya woods in the southeast of Magadha, practicing Buddhism with 500 externalist religious people.

The flourishing papaya woods were a perfect place for practicing Buddhism. However, one day an evil dragon appeared in a hut, sleeping in the daytime but devouring livestock and injuring villagers at night. The whole papaya village was a total mess and in a state of anxiety. Three Kasyapa brothers then decided to kill the dragon and bring peace to the villagers. With thousands of armed externalist religious people and villagers, three brothers surrounded and chopped the dragon that was furiously blowing fire at them.

Fire god, the highest god in Indian fairytales, would surely defeat the evil dragon. So three brothers put out a table of offerings in the Fire god Temple and prayed to the Fire god to tame the dragon. The kind Fire god was willing to get rid of the dragon for villagers and challenged the dragon. Two groups of flame from Fire god and dragon mixed. It was hard to tell who won. They did not stop fighting until they were exhausted but the Fire god knew he was beaten, and left resentfully.

Therefore, the papaya village suffered more horror and despotic power from the reckless dragon.

At that time, externalist religious people were more numerous than the Buddhists. After becoming god, Sakyamuni traveled all over the world and recruited followers to preach Buddhism. When Sakyamuni passed by the hut where the three brothers lived, he wanted to stay there. The youngest, evil-minded brother thought, "We believe in a contrary religion. But it was said that Buddhism was powerful. Why not take the chance to get rid of an opponent by way of the evil dragon?" So he said to the other two brothers, "It's too late and

unreasonable to refuse him. Great master, we have a hut in the woods for you.

Sakyamuni said happily, "Thanks, please show me the way."

"Alright. Follow me." The youngest brother voluntarily showed the way, but pointed the direction and then excused himself.

Sakyamuni entered the hut and put some hay on the wet floor, sat cross-legged on the hay and chanted sutra silently with his eyes closed.

It was too dark to see anything. After eating, the evil dragon went back home. The hut was actually where the dragon was living. When he saw Sakyamuni sitting there, he was furious and opened his mouth and spurted out flames to Sakyamuni.

But Sakyamuni was still sitting firmly and fearlessly reading sutra. He was surrounded by splendid golden rays all over to put out the fire and lit both the hut and woods as bright as daytime.

The dragon was not going to give up and continued to shoot flames at him, but it could not beat Sakyamuni. So the dragon wriggled and was going to retreat.

Sakyamuni asked, "Why are you slaughtering the villagers here?"

Sadly, the dragon replied, "I believed in externalist religion and practiced here. One day, I was suffering from dysentery and making the village stinky. The three Kasyapa brothers and their followers hated the smell and drove me away. So I started wandering and begging. Finally I died from illness and hunger.

Then I reincarnated into a firedrake to seek revenge. I came back to the village, injuring whoever I met and eating livestock to release my resentment."

Sakyamuni nodded, "I see. Illness and death are troublesome and give people great worry. But if you believe in Buddhism and practice hard, you'll stay away from bitterness."

The dragon then formally acknowledged Sakyamuni as his teacher and converted to be a Buddhist. Sakyamuni told him, "Since you're converting to a Buddhist today, you have to be kind and strictly obey the commandments to get final success." The dragon kept it firmly in mind.

The three brothers didn't sleep that night. They were going to escape if the dragon won. But if Sakyamuni won, the village was still under their control. So after the fight, they went to the hut to see the result.

How strange! The flames didn't ruin the hut and trees nearby. Sakyamuni was still safely sitting in the hut. Lying in the Buddhist bowl, the dragon reached out its head when three brothers came in. The three brothers were too frightened to move, but Sakyamuni said, "Be calm villagers, the dragon won't hurt you."

They asked with surprise, "Did you tame the dragon?"

"You invited the Fire god to tame the dragon, but failed. I used three types of magic fire to tame it. Now it has become my follower and converted to Buddhism."

"But the evil dragon has killed so many innocent people. Why did you still recruit it?"

"Buddhism is so broad that anyone who wants to be kind is permitted to convert."

After seeing the power of Buddhism, the three brothers knelt down and acknowledged Sakyamuni as their teacher. They also called together 500 externalist religious people to study Buddhist doctrines. Finally 500 people converted to be Buddhists.

Translated by Lian Jinping

103

Brahman Devoted His Body

Cave 322, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

Long ago, there was a cloud-kissing mountain in ancient India. The mountaintop was perpetually covered in snow. At the foot of the mountain, there was picturesque scenery with a village full of fruit trees and birds that were always singing on fine spring days. There was a Brahman who was buried alive in this remote mountain area, cultivating himself according to Buddhist doctrine. He ate fruits and drank from a spring when he felt hungry and thirsty. He had diligently practiced Buddhist rules for numerous years, but he still couldn't find the Greatest Wisdom or view the Buddha's birth. However, he still persisted in his ascetic ways by sitting in intense meditation.

The Brahman's sincere cultivation moved Sakra-devanam-indra. He decided to arrange some trials for Brahman with the aim of testing whether or not the Brahman deeply understood Buddhism's righteousness and whether or not he was capable of the important task of being a Buddha.

After leaving "Thirty-Three Celestials", Sakra-devanam-indra became a Rasetsu with a sinister appearance and went to the place where the Brahman cultivated himself. He then recited, with a silvery voice, a sentence of wisdom told by the Buddha, "Nothing in the world will exist forever, all life will come to an end eventually."

When the Brahman heard this, he was suddenly enlightened, and comprehended the brilliance and significance of Buddhist doctrine. He was joyous, like a seriously ill patient who meets a well-trained doctor, or a hungry man who finds ample food, or a thirsty man who finds a pure spring.

The Brahman couldn't sit in meditation as usual any more, so he stood up and looked around to find out who had spoken with such wisdom. However, after a long time of searching, he found nobody but an ugly Rasetsu. He thought

to himself, "The Rasetsu recited such words of great wisdom? No human beings or even ghosts should be judged by their appearance. The Rasetsu might have heard these words spoken by the Buddha. I should ask him."

The Brahman approached the Rasetsu, saluted and asked, "My master, I wish to resign myself to your guidance. Would you please tell me where you received your wisdom? It was the wisdom spoken by every Buddha in the past, present and future."

The Rasetsu said, "Don't imagine that it is possible for me to tell you anything, I just spoke some words out. Now the most important thing is that I haven't eaten anything for several days, I am very hungry."

"Master, if you recite the next half sentence of wisdom, I will be willing to be your disciple and regard you as my master."

The Rasetsu said angrily, "Who wants you to be my disciple? You are so unsophisticated. I am too hungry to say anything. How can you depend on me to give you wisdom?"

"Master, what do you want to eat? I will pre-

pare it for you."

"You cannot find the things that I could eat. You will be scared when you hear it."

"Just tell me please, I won't be afraid."

"I never eat anything else except a human's fresh flesh and blood; but nowadays, people are full of good fortune and are blessed by god. Though I have searched for several days, I still cannot find anyone to eat."

"If you tell me the next half sentence of wisdom, I will offer you my own flesh and blood."

"Ha, giving away your precious life for the sake of that half sentence? Are you kidding me?"

"I am not joking. My words are sincere. I will receive nothing should a tiger or wolf eat my body. I will offer you my body because I wish to hear wisdom. Isn't this something one would wish to do? I will be equal to my word and will never break my promise. Sakra-devanam-indra, four Virapaksa, all Bodhisattva and one hundred thousand deities will bear witness for me".

"Good, if you can do that, I will tell you the next half sentence," the Rasetsu agreed.

The Brahman was extremely pleased as he took off his deerskin cloth, setting a dharmasana for the Rasetsu. After he had invited the Rasetsu to sit on the dharmasana, the Brahman groveled in front of the dharmasana and listened to the next half sentence respectfully.

"Human beings will never be born in affliction, and will arrive at the perpetual joy of Nirvana, only if they extricate themselves from the cycle of life and death."

The Brahman was extremely delighted after he listened to the sentence. He wrote the sentence everywhere on stones, crags, trunks and roadsides in order to remember the wisdom. After he finished, the Brahman climbed to the top of a large tree.

The Rasetsu couldn't understand him and asked, "What do you want to do on the top of the tree?"

"I would like to jump down, and let the Rasetsu eat my flesh and blood in order to keep my promise."

"Was the wisdom useful? Was it worth your life?" the Rasetsu asked questioningly.

"You don't understand. These sentences are extremely valuable. They are the conclusions of wisdom draw by all Buddhas from the past, present, and future. This wisdom is worth giving up my body for," the Brahman answered firmly.

After saying that, the Brahman jumped down from the top of the tree. At that time, immortal music played while flowers blossomed in the sky. The Rasetsu changed back to Sakra-devanam-indra, held the Brahman in the sky, and then placed him on the ground gently. Afterward, Sakra-devanam-indra saluted and granted him glorification.

"Great, Bodhisattva, you lit the torch in the darkness for all men, while I protected the power of the Buddha by testing you as a Rasetsu. I am sorry if I have offended you. You cultivated yourself according to Buddhist doctrine, and respected Buddha sincerely. You will surely become a Buddha in the future."

The Sakra-devanam-indra went back to the "Thirty-Three Celestials."

Translated by Wang Jie

104

Zhang Qian Setting Off to the Western Regions

North Wall, Cave 323, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

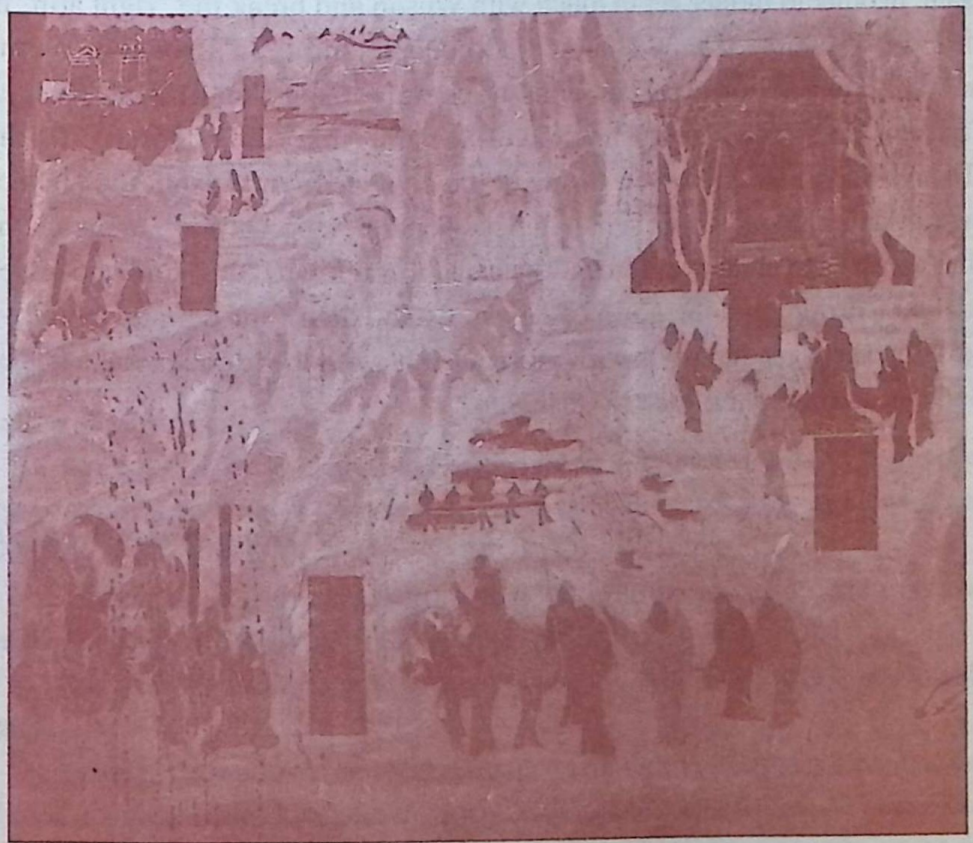
In 139 BC, the great explorer Zhang Qian of the Western Han Dynasty (706 BC-AD 25) explored what later became the Silk Road. It was he who received orders to lead his fellows to visit the West, and at the same time try to find and contact the Great Yüeh-chin, who had been dislodged by the Huns. Then they were to attack the Huns together with the Great Yüeh-chin.

The group of Zhang Qian started from Chang'an City, passed through Longxi and went towards the west. They experienced terrible weather including days of intense sun, rain, wind and cold. The environment was inhospitable and their difficulties were extremely hard to believe. However, Zhang Qian took the risk of traveling west with firm confidence and without fear of hardship. When they arrived at the Hexi Corridor, they were detected by a Hun dragon. Zhang Qian was captured together with his one hundred corteges by the Huns.

After the king of the Huns, Chief of the Tribe learned the purpose of Zhang Qian's visit, he would not let them pass. Chief of the Tribe dispersed them to be wranglers and goat herds, and sent guards to supervise them vigilantly. Moreover, in order to watch him and lure him into surrendering, Chief of the Tribe compelled Zhang Qian to marry a Hunnish girl. However, Zhang Qian was faithful and persevering. As he was under house arrest, life was hard, and days seemed like years. Despite all this, he still waited for an opportunity to escape and finish his task.

Eleven years later, the Huns loosened their surveillance. Zhang Qian took advantage of the opportunity to flee the Hunnish region together with his valet Gan Fu. They kept on traveling towards the west. Due to their hurried escape, they didn't prepare any food or water. Thus they frequently had to endure hun-

ger and thirst on the way. They could have died in the desert at any moment. Luckily, Gan Fu was skilled at woodcraft, so they hunted birds and beasts on the way, eating meat and drinking blood, thus they survived. After several days of running, they finally passed through the desert, trampling over frozen hills and dales (today's Pamirs) and arrived in the country of Tashken (today's Fergana). The king of that country had blue eyes and a high bridged nose, and had heard for a long time that the Han Dynasty was a rich and large country, thus he wanted to establish diplomatic relations with the Han, but due to the great distance and inconvenience of transportation, this aim had never been achieved. The king was so pleased when he heard the news that Han's emissary was coming. He met Zhang Qian fervidly. He invited Zhang Qian to see the rare horse named Xuehan. Under the help of the king of Tashken, Zhang Qian



successively arrived in Kangju (today's Samarqand), the Great Yüeh-chin, Kingdom of Bactria and so on. Nevertheless, the Great Yüeh-chin lived and worked in peace and contentment upriver on Amu Darya. He didn't want to go to the East and to fight with the Hun. Thus, Zhang Qian didn't finish his task of allying with the Great Yüeh-chin to attack the Hun, but he acquired huge amount of information and knowledge of anthropology and geography about various countries in the Western Regions.

On his way back, Zhang Qian was captured by the Hun again, and he tried to escape once more. Finally after 13 years he returned to Chang'an, during which time he had experienced innumerable trials and hardships. The visit to the west taught the Han much about the people in the west, which inspired the emperor of Han to exploit the border land, by starting a series anti-Hun war.

In 119 BC, Han Dynasty sent Zhang Qian to visit the Western Regions again, in order to further get in touch with Wusun and break the "right arm" of the Hun. This time, Zhang Qian led 300 people and they arrived at Wusun smoothly. In addition, assistant emissaries were dispatched to visit Kangju, Tashken, Great Yüeh-chin, Kingdom of Bactria, Anxi (today's Iraq), Sindhu (Today's India) etc. However, owing to the civil strife in Wusun, the alliance failed. The emperor of Han sent a famous general, Huo Qubing, to attack the Hun with a large number of forces. The general annihilated the Hun who stayed at Hexi Corridor and the north of desert, established four counties and two passes in Hexi, got through the Silk Road and obtained the immolation, a golden Buddha, and brought it back to Chang'an.

Translated by Wang Jie

Story 105

Monk Fotucheng

North Wall, Cave 323, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

Fotucheng came from the West. He possessed an incomparable intelligence ever since his youth. After becoming a monk under the guidance of a famous elder monk, he could read thousands of lections. He could also recite the lections as soon as he read them. He was good at not only understanding the power of Buddha, but also at incantations as well. He was able to turn death into life, and also was able to understand the meaning of the sound of the iron wind-bell.

At the end of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) chaos reigned. A number of heroes set up a separatist regime by force in a central area of the country. Thousands of fields were destroyed and many commoners became homeless.

The ruler of Luoyang City was named Shi Le. He didn't believe in the power of Buddha, so there were only a few scattered monks and only a small number of pilgrims. At this time, Fotucheng had just traveled to Luoyang City. Shi Le, the ruler of Luoyang City asked if Guo Heilue, an understrapper of Shi Le, respected the power of Buddha. Guo Heilüe nodded and told Shi Le that after listening to Fotucheng's intensive explanation of the power of Buddha, he understood it thoroughly.

Shi Le was very surprised. He then asked, "You've won every battle over the past several years. I assume that there must have been someone who was helping you, correct?"

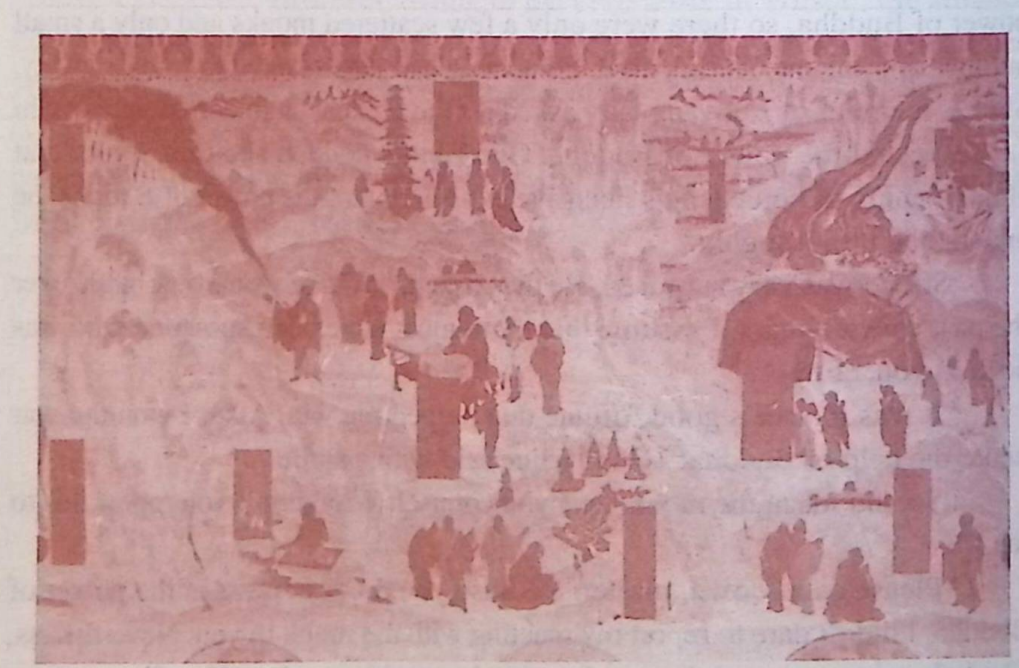
"It was master's good fortune that helped me win. Also, I won the war under the help of Buddha!" Guo Heilue said with a smile.

"So you mean the monk gave you counsel. Why didn't you report this to me?"

"Please calm down, master. Because you don't believe in the power of Buddha, I didn't dare to report my meeting with the monk to you. Nevertheless, I had already respected the monk as my honorable teacher. He often told me

that I would soon help to establish a country in a central area. He came to Luoyang City from a great distance to help you become king. He did not have a chance to assist you because you didn't believe in Buddha.

Shi Le was so glad after hearing this that he rode his horses, drove carriages and set up a ceremony to invite Fotucheng to his palace personally. He held a banquet to welcome Fotucheng and to simultaneously consult on a strategy of establishing a country. Since Fotucheng had stayed in Luoyang for several years, he understood Shi Le's strategy clearly. He knew that Shi Le managed the state through force and violence and had no idea about managing a country through morals. He advised Shi Le, "The Buddha says the abyss of misery is endless, repent and be saved. By casting your bread upon the waters before death, you will go to heaven. Perpetrating ferocity before death, you will go to hell. If you want to be a king of a country, you have to manage the country by virtue and courtesy. Only then will you gain the support of the people. A state must set its own national law. You should manage the country according to that law. You can't kill people or perform executions unceremoniously. You should allow the common people to pursue a decent livelihood, let them return



home and eat. This way people will be willing to fight for you, and your prestige will improve at the same time".

Shi Le listened to Fotucheng and soon he established Late Zhao Dynasty (319-351) in the Luoyang region. The Late Zhao Dynasty stood up to Liuyao's Early Zhao Dynasty as an equal. Shi Le regarded Fotucheng as the brains behind his governing and consulted him on nearly everything. Shi Le thus celebrated Buddhism on large scale in his kingdom. The burning of incense, for example, flourished everyday in the Luoyang region. Common people from other regions came to Late Zhao Dynasty, which provided Shi Le with a powerful army and human resources.

At one time, Fotucheng followed Shi Le to battle. Shi Le was victorious. On the way back, they stopped in a village for a break. Fotucheng said, "Prepare well tonight. Our enemy is planning a sneak attack."

Shi Le thought to himself that since the enemy suffered a severe defeat, how could they possibly mount an attack at night? He doubted Fotucheng's words, but still set a guard against the enemy. The enemies attacked at midnight but lost badly and were killed by Shi Le's army. Shi Le fully rewarded and honored Fotucheng.

Fotucheng had helped Shi Le win a number of battles and worked for the country, but Shi Le still took precautions against him. One dark night, Shi Le suddenly issued orders to prepare for a fight. He called Fotucheng,"According to a spy, there will be a sneak-raid from the enemy tonight. Please offer me a good plan, my counselor."

Fotucheng laughed, "In my opinion, you should order the army to rest. I assure that there will not be a battle tonight."

"But what if there is?" asked Shi Le.

"I swear to you!" said Fotucheng, "I understand my master's means. Please do not act this way, otherwise you will disturb the heart of your army."

Shi Le had nothing to say. He transmitted an order to his army to rest.

However, Shi Le didn't respect or trust Fotucheng as much as he had before becoming king of Late Zhao Dynasty. He became quite jealous of Fotucheng's ability of predicting things accurately. He thought that it would be best to kill him to rid himself of his growing anxiety. Assassins were then contacted to murder Fotucheng in his palace. However, Fotucheng hadn't come

out to discuss official business for the past three days. In fact, Fotucheng had been hiding in Guo Heilue's house the entire time.

Shi Le realized that Fotucheng was aware of his intentions and began to regret what he had planned. He thought to himself, "Fotucheng helped me win a number of battles to gain the kingship. It would be ungrateful of me if I killed him at this moment. It would be better to invite him to assist me in governing my country."

The next morning, Shi Le intended to go in person to invite Fotucheng to his palace. However, Fotucheng had already taken it upon himself to visit. Shi Le asked purposely, "Master, where were you the past few days? Why didn't you come to discuss official affairs?"

"I was avoiding death."

"Who dared to plan on murdering you?" Shi Le asked guiltily.

"Please forgive me for telling the truth, but it was you who wanted to kill me three days ago. I had to hide. Last night you felt that there was no justification in killing me, thus you felt regret. I've now come to see you."

"My master, in all honesty, I had never thought about killing you," Shi Le said guiltily, "We have to be of one mind to complete our great undertaking!"

That year, the king of Early Zhao Dynasty, Liu Yao led his army to attack Luoyang, and got far enough to encircle the city. Shi Le, however, was in Xiangyang at that time. Liu Yao wanted to defeat Luoyang, but Luoyang's understrappers stopped him. Shi Le was in a quandary. Thus he went to ask Fotucheng for advice. Fotucheng pointed to the iron wind-bell on the tower and said, "The sound of the wind-bell was silvery, which tells me that if you dispatched troops you would win the battle. Please go to Luoyang." Shi Le personally led his army back to Luoyang, and attacked the enemy. Liu Yao lost the battle and retreated, fell into a deep chasm, and was finally captured by Shi Le's army. From then on, Shi Le further respected Fotucheng, and regarded him as the counselor of the country.

However, something quite unexpected happened. One day, Shi Le's favorite son became ill and later died. Shi Le invited all the well-known doctors in the city to diagnose and treat his son. All of them said it was hopeless to bring his son back. It was then suggested that the counselor come and have a look. Fotucheng came to diagnose the child's illness. He broke a branch of willow,

and held a bowl of water. He dipped the willow into water, spilled the water on to the child's body and read aloud a prayer. After reading the prayer three times, the child opened his eyes slowly and sat up. The family was pleased and so surprised. They prostrated and kowtowed towards Fotucheng. After that, the news of the counselor being able to bring the dead back to life spread all over the country.

About eight years later, Shi Le died of sickness and his son Shi Hu inherited the crown. One day, Shi Hu drank and chatted with the counselor at a pavilion in the garden. While chatting, Fotucheng suddenly stood up and pointed to the north saying, "Oh no! The city of Youzhou is on fire!"

Shi Hu thought that he was joking and said,

"Counselor, you've drunk too much. Enough of the drunk talk!"

"Stop joking," Fotucheng retorted, "It is important to fight the fire otherwise the people of Youzhou will suffer a great tragedy."

Futuocheng held out a bowl of alcohol, recited a prayer and tossed the alcohol in the direction of Youzhou. Then he sat down and drank again. He told Shi Hu, "My words weren't those of a drunk. The city of Youzhou really caught fire."

Shi Hu couldn't understand and asked, "Counselor, why do you say so? Where is the fire? What's the matter?"

"My king, if you don't believe me please send a scout to Youzhou to check on what I've said. If there was no fire, please punish me."

Shi Hu promptly sent understrappers to examine if there was a fire in Youzhou. Several days later, a spy returned and reported, "On the noon of that day, just at the moment the king drank with counselor, a fire started inside the city of Youzhou. The fire spread around the city, houses and huts were burned, and people ran away for their lives. At that time, dark cloud suddenly appeared from the south. Within moments it began to rain. A few moments later, the fire was put out. People smelled alcohol in the rainwater.

Shi Hu was speechless. Then he rewarded the counselor.

Translated by Wang Jie

106

Priest Tan Yan

South Wall, Cave 323, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-904

Priest Tan Yan was born in a rich and powerful Yun family in Sangquan, Puzhou and he was well educated. One day he became interested in Buddhism after listening to the sutra taught by an abbot when he was making a pilgrimage in the temple. After reading several sutras, he appreciated what Buddhism was teaching about treating sentient beings universally and being kind. Hence he was tonsured when he was 16 and started studying sutras. Thanks to his hard working and comprehension, young Priest Tan Yan became a professional Buddhist when he was 22. In order to improve his understandings, young Priest Tan Yan lived and practiced Buddhism in Baiti Temple of south Taihang Mountains when he was traveling.

There lived a Buddhist Xue in Zhongchao Mountain who was well read and knowledgeable. He went to visit Priest Tan Yan when he knew Tan was practicing Buddhism in Baiti Temple. After conventional greetings, Buddhist Xue said, "I am practicing at home and wrote down four words for your comments."

Modest Priest Tan Yan said, "That's alright. I'm not talented and would like to exchange ideas with you. What are the four words? Let's try to figure them out."

"Square, round, move and silence."

"Square is like a city, round is like the eye of wisdom, move is like that of a wave, and silence is like Nirvana," Priest Tan Yan replied professionally and vividly.

Buddhist Xue praised the explanations by Priest Tan Yan as a genius. From then on, Xue often visited Tan and they exchanged their thoughts.

The dream of Priest Tan Yan was to write notes for the "Nirvana Sutra". Before writing, he often lit joss sticks and prayed for Buddha's instructions in

case of any misgivings. One night, Tan dreamed about a man in white, riding a white horse, on a white cloud going to Baiti Temple. He then quickly stopped the horse and talked with the man. Suddenly, with all difficulties disappearing, he felt ideas flowing. The dream and their conversation were still as vivid as it was when he was asleep. Tan believed it was Master Ma Ming giving directions for him to note the sutra. Hence, he worked harder and finished the notes. In order to check the preciseness, Tan went to the famous dagoba of Renxiao Temple and put "Nirvana Sutra" as well as the notes in front of the temple and swore, "Holy Buddha, I ventured to note the sutra in order to carry forward Buddhism. Please show me its accuracy. If I offended you, I will burn them and not publicize them."

After listening to Tan's promises, mighty Buddha felt his sincerity and covered the dagoba with golden lights. Tan's sutra and notes sparkled. Golden rays surrounded the temple for three days, which was worshiped by followers far and near.

The abbot of Renxiao Temple reported the story to King Wen of the Sui

Dynasty (581-618), a Buddhist who was very delighted, believing it was a good sign of a prosperous kingdom. The king then forwarded his orders to invite Priest Tan Yan and listened to his teachings with hundreds of officials. Supported by the king, Priest Tan Yan published the notes and brought the trend of conversion all over the country. King Wen built a Cloud Temple in a beautiful and peaceful place near the capital in order to listen to Tan's classes and invited him as the abbot.

Zhou Hongzheng, a famous, knowledgeable and eloquent scholar was invited by King Wen. The king ordered, "Any people whether tonsured or not is allowed to debate with Zhou Hongzheng. The winner will be awarded."

After preparation, the big day came. Thousands of scholars gathered together, surrounding Zhou Hongzheng who was lecturing with abundant topics and enigmatic questions. The king, officials and scholars were astonished and found it hard to respond, which made Zhou Hongzheng quite full of himself.

But at that time, Priest Tan Yan stood up and said, "I've heard of scholar Zhou for a long time. It's a pleasure to meet you today. It's unnecessary to bother His Majesty and his officials to answer your questions. I'll explain instead." Seeing the monk challenging him, Zhou looked down on Tan, and raised many strange questions to embarrass him. But the erudite and quick-minded Tan replied to each hard question correctly. Zhou then dispelled his arrogance and said sincerely with respect to Tan, "Please accept my groveling. I've walked all over the country and met you today finally. It's not too late. I'm willing to be tonsured right away and follow you." From then on, Zhou became Tan's favorite follower and learned Buddhism in the Cloud Temple.

In 586, it was a drought year without any rain. The farmland was cracked without any grain. Refugees and dead bodies were all over the country. King Sui and his officials were extremely worried and invited three monks to pray for rains. But there was still the burning sun, scorching and shining without any sign of clouds. So King Sui invited Tan and asked, "Why is there still no rain although three monks prayed for three days with broken knees?"

Tan replied, "My Majesty, you're the leader of people and the officials are like their parents. Those monks are just normal people. The Dragon King will not get moved if the leader and parents do not sincerely pray."

King Wen followed Tan's reasonable suggestion and put on a cassock and prayed for rain with his officials. They were successful. At noon, clouds appeared. Soon wind blew and cold air came. Suddenly, it rained. The dry land came alive with the rain. Peasants were busy sowing to vegetate fields. Hence, the timely wind and rain brought good harvests. People escaped from disaster and King Wen was delighted and awarded Priest Tan Yan.

Translated by Lian Jinping

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The Auspicious Statue at Xiling Temple

South Wall, Cave 323, Tang Dynasty, 781-847

During the Xianhe year of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), a place named Zhanghou Bridge was located in Danyang City. A strange thing appeared in the riverside near the bridge. Whenever night came, there was golden light that could be seen by all the villagers. The light was shining and flickering without fixed time, nobody knew if it was good or evil. Therefore, people were scared and rumors began. Someone said the demon made trouble and someone said a ghost was around. Someone said the spirit might come to the earth. In order to comfort the people and discover the truth, Mayor Gao Li took his staff to see the bridge. As sunset began, the sky was filled with stars, the golden light suddenly appeared. Mayor Gao was fearless and took his staff to get close to the place the light came from.

Confirming where the light came from, Mayor Gao ordered his staff to dig out the earth. They found a statue of a spirit at the ten-foot level. As the statue was carried out, they were all amazed. The statue was shining with golden light and made them feel dizzy. The statue outshone the latern and torch. The villagers then realized that the light shining at night was not demon or a ghost, but the statue. All the doubts were removed and people knelt in adoration of the statue.

Mayor Gao had believed in Buddhism. He was overjoyed in his mind while digging out the golden statue. He examined it carefully, it was handmade, well cast, and made of pure gold. He found the words etched on the back that appearted to be Sanskrit, but he couldn't read it. He assumed that the statue was a Buddhist statue made by ancient India, but had no idea why it was buried here.

As per the rules of casting statues, it should have had lotus pedestal and a backlight wherever the statue was found. However, they couldn't find these two things. And then, Mayor Gao ordered them to dig continuously downward. Nothing was found as they dug around from side to side the entire night. Till the sun rose from the east, they worked but they didn't found anything and thus gave up. They asked for an oxcart to take the gold statue and came back.

On the way back, Mayor Gao thought himself, "This statue is priceless. If I invite it to my home and keep it myself, I can worship the Buddha and chant day and night. It is time for Buddha to show its power and praise me good fortune from the heaven."

Gao was overjoyed but suddenly the sedan stopped. The cart stopped at the crossroad. Up ahead was the Changgan Street, where the city office located. On the right side was the Xiling Street, where the famous Xiling Temple was located.

"Why have we stopped moving?" Mayor Gao asked.

"Dear official, the oxcart that took the statue stopped here and will go no further. Please determine what to do."

"Mayor Gao got off the sedan and looked. He saw the coachman strapped hardly on the ox, but the ox would't move.

"If the ox still refuses to go, we will ask people to push the cart."

Some strong staff came around immediately, caught the cart, and pushed it with their tremendous effort, but the oxcart didn't move.

Mayor Gao realized there must be a reason for this. Maybe the gold statue was not allowing them to move because he selfishly desired the statue for himself. Then, he sighed and said, "Well, forget it. Do not force the ox again. Let it go. Let it take us where it will."

The coachman unlashed the rein and let the ox go as it pleased. The ox took the cart and turned right onto Xiling Street. It continued untill the cart arrived at the gate of Xiling Temple. Mayor Gao had no choice but to send the statue to the abbot and monks of Xiling Temple for worship.

The gold statue was set in the main hall of Xiling Temple. Once in the dark night, the statue always shined with beautiful glimmers. The bell, the ancient zither and drum, rhythmically sounded with beautiful Buddhism music. The monks could not help but enjoy having this treasure in the temple.

One year later, a fisher named Zhang Xishi from Linhai County, went fishing one day and found a round object floating on the ocean, which shined beautiful lights in the sunshine. He was curious and paddled toward it. As he neared it, he saw a brightly flashing lotus pedestal made of copper. He placed the pedestal on the boat and took it back home. On April 8th, Buddha Sakyamuni's birthday, he spared no effort to pay respect to the gold statue at Xiling Temple in Danyang. He didn't find the pedestal and then wondered whether the pedestal at home was part of the statue. He sent the pedestal by cart to Xiling Temple and put it under that statue, which was just the right size. The abbot praised Zhang Xishi for his strong morality.

One year later, five Hu monks came from the West. They walked around under the Zhanghou bridge, and said they were looking for a gold statue. Some believers told them not to worry because the gold statue had been taken away by Mayor Gao Li. Five Hu monks went to the city office and said to the mayor, "When we were young, we went to Sindhu Deer Park to pray to the Buddha and learn the scripture. The abbot was moved by our heart and soul, then sent us a

gold statue and brought it back to spread Buddhism. We took the gold statue to Danyang by boat but came across the turmoil of the war. In order to prevent the statue from being robbed and looted, we then buried the statue, pedestal and backlight near the riverside under the Zhanghou Bridge respectively to keep it away from fire and war. We have learned that the war ended and people lived peacefully, so we came to look for the statue to uncover and worship it. Who knew the statue had been dug out by Mr. Gao? Could you let us worship it?"

"Senior monks, the gold statue was really dug out, but it is not at my home."

"Dear Official, where is the statue right now?"

"Right now it sits in the Xiling Temple for worship, I can take you there."

Mayor Gao took the five Hu monks to Xiling Temple and explained to the abbot. The abbot took them to the main hall. At that moment, the drum sounded and the bell rang. The five Hu monks brimmed with tears and prayed to the gold statue. After worship, they cried out and scolded themselves for breaching of duty by burying the statue in the earth.

The gold statue lit up the main hall with its magnificence. All followers were showered the golden light and felt illuminated by it. The five Hu monks stood up and walked around the statue three times. They found that the statue was in a poor light. One of the Hu monks asked, "Excuse me, Mr. Gao, respectable abbot, did you find the backlight of the statue?"

"I never found it. I only dug out the statue and the pedestal was sent by the fisherman who found it in the ocean."

"Without the backlight, the statue is not intact, that is our duty. We should bring it back." The five Hu monks stayed one night at Xiling Temple. The next morning, they went out to look for the backlight respectively.

A man named Dong Zongzhi lived in Hepu County of Jiao Zhou and was good at swimming. He made a living by collecting the pearls by diving into the sea. One day, he dove into the sea and found an object lying among the coral. At first, he thought it must be some monster in the sea and didn't approach it. Looking for a moment, he discovered that it never moved and swam to take it. Swimming to the surface, he found it was an object made of gold. He brought it back home and looked from side to side, but could not recognize it. One day, a

Hu monk happened to come by begging. Dong Zongzhi invited him to have a meal and showed the object to him.

The Hu monks was intoxicated as he looked at it and said to him, "Dear benefactor, it is the backlight of the gold statue at Xiling Temple. I have been looking for it everywhere for a long time. Dear benefactor, please give me an offer, I will buy it."

Dong Zongzhi was happy when he heard that and said, "Monk, I am also a follower of Buddhism and always cultivate myself at home. As it is the backlight of Buddha, a sacred object, how can I sell it for money? That is to blasphemy to the Buddha. I will send it to Xiling Temple and keep the statue intact and perfect."

They packed the backlight carefully. Hu monk brought it back to Xiling Temple at Danyang and asked the other monks to return immediately.

When all five Hu monks returned, the abbot invited Mayor Gao and other followers to hold a grand ceremony to place the backlight. That day, all the drums and bells sounded together, and the kato also played. All the followers dressed up and respectfully they placed the backlight behind the statue, fastened the rivet in alignment with the former hole, and fixed it up. At that moment, music accompanied by drumbeats sounded all round throughout the main hall. Henceforth, the gold statue at Xiling Temple was well known far and wide. Thousands of followers came to worship it.

Translated by Zhang Ming

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The God of Thunder and the Siblings of the Gourd

Ceiling, Cave 329, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-704

Since the Goddess of Sky mended the sky, people who lived on earth found a new life and became prosperous again. They not only planted grains and corns in the fertile soil but also raised livestock and fowl. They also offered sacrifices to the gods in heaven. Everyone led a happy life.

The god of Thunder put 12 drums on his back and when he hit them, thunder and lightning would flash. The amount of rainfall was decided by the sound of the drums. In order to have good weather, people admired the god of Thunder and sacrificed hog heads every Feb. 2nd.

One year, a family had no hog heads to sacrifice, so they used a dog's head as a substitute. The god of Thunder found out and became very angry. He felt that he had been cheated and insulted. The god of Thunder then decided to make a flood to drown them. He beat his drums and made thunder boom ceaselessly as a terrible storm flooded the fields, even carrying away people's homes in the strong currents. Many people set up an altar and sacrificed cows and sheep in order to placate the god of Thunder. But the god of Thunder had a bad temper and nothing could stop him wrecking this havoc on those below.

During that summer, dark clouds covered the sky for dozens of days while the thunder boomed relentlessly. Wherever the people fled, the flood would follow them. They could not escape from the doom. All of them were bound to die in the rising waters.

At that time, there was a couple with a son and daughter living in Qilian Mountain. The son was older than the daughter. Because they lived on the top of the mountain, their lives were unaffected by the flood. Their father was a warrior who was good at martial arts. He was so powerful that no one could

compete with him, he once had even caught a tiger with his bare hands. The warrior knew that the storms and flooding were caused by the god of Thunder. He decided to fight with the god and kill him to ease the people's suffering. The warrior and his wife made a huge iron cage and a sharp steel prong. Their children were very curious and asked,"Daddy, why are you making this cage?"

"My dear children, I will use it to catch the god of Thunder and stop him from beating the drums!" their father said loudly.

By accident, the words were heard by the god of Thunder who was terribly enraged and he gnashed his teeth with anger. He rushed down from the sky and prepared to fight with the warrior. From far away people could hear the thundering and see the lightning and the storm became even more severe. Hearing the thundering coming closer, the warrior knew that the god of Thunder had come down from the sky. He carried his steel prong and rushed out of his house. There he was exposed to the wind and rain. Suddenly lightning flashed in the sky, day turned to night, and a terrible thundering erupted. Holding a pair of broad axes, the god of Thunder came down from the clouds and he stared at the warrior with a cruel glitter in his eyes. But the warrior was not frightened. Before the god of Thunder had steadied himself, the warrior had struck his steel prong into the waist of the god of Thunder. No one before had ever dared to fight him! He was wounded, caught by the warrior, and put into the cage.

After the god was caught, the thunder subsided, the rain stopped and the sky cleared again. The warrior decided to tell the people the good news and ask them how to punish the god. Before he set out, the warrior warned his children.

"Your Mom and I will go out and we'll come back very soon. Please watch the cage and don't give the beast any water."

After their parents left, the boy and the girl sat beside the cage and stared at the god of Thunder. They saw that he had a green face and huge tusks. They were so terrified that they dared not say anything.

The god of Thunder thought about how to break out of the cage. He pretended to be in extreme pain and moaned loudly. He said to the children, "I was wounded and I'm so thirsty now. Please give me some water to drink!"

"Impossible! Father told us before he left that we could give you no water." the brother said seriously.

Finding that his scheme hadn't worked, the god of Thunder said again, "I will die if I have no water. Could you just give me a drop of water?"

"No, no. There's nothing we can give to you!"

"Then could you give me some hogwash? Do have some pity on me! What I ask you now is only some dirty water."

Because the girl saw that he was in so much suffering and had begged them again and again, her heart melted with pity and she said to her brother, "He was wounded and is now miserable. Let's just give him some hogwash. I'm sure that it will be alright."

The boy thought for a second and agreed with her. He himself also thought that some dirty water would not bring about any trouble.

The children carried a bucket of hogwash and put it in front of the god of Thunder. He couldn't get his head out of the cage, so the girl picked up a wheat straw from the ground and gave it to him. The god of Thunder used the straw to suck hogwash from the bucket. When he drank the first mouthful of hogwash, his spirit came back to him. After he sucked the second mouthful of hogwash, his head turned into a head of hog. After he sucked for the third time, the iron cage broke and he jumped out. As he drank water, he became extremely powerful and full of magic.

The god of Thunder pulled a tooth from his mouth and handed it to the children and said, "Thank you very much for saving me. This tooth is for you. You must plant it in the earth as soon as possible and wait until it grows and bears fruit. Then keep the fruit and whenever there's a disaster, you can hide inside its fruit."

After he finished speaking, he rushed out of the yard and returned to the clouds.

When the parents of the children came back home, they were shocked when they saw that the cage was broken and the god of Thunder had escaped. They knew that the god of Thunder would not stay away and would come back to seek revenge.

The children knew that they had done the wrong thing, and dared not admit to their action. They snuck out and planted the tooth of the god of Thunder. Very soon, it started to sprout and grew many vines. Later it flowered and bore

its fruit. It turned out to be a big gourd. The children were just small enough to hide within it.

After the god of Thunder went back to heaven, he was so angry that he beat the drums and it thundered and rained every day. The storming went on and the flood flushed the plains, villages, and mountain. All the land became an ocean. The boy and the girl hurried to hide in the gourd to avoid drowning in the floods. When the storm ceased and the floods receded, the gourd stopped sailing about. The children climbed out of the gourd and saw all the houses were destroyed by the flood and all the fields were ruined. There were numerous dead animals and people lying on the ground. The god of Thunder was merciless and he killed all the human beings except the two children.

The children were homeless and had lost all of their relatives. The girl was afraid and sad, and she regretted what she had done for the god of Thunder. She couldn't help crying out. Her brother came up to her and tried to comfort her, "Don't cry, sister. It's really our fault that we let the god of Thunder go but we can't change it now. Don't blame yourself. Let's work hard and manage to live by our own means. We are now the only people alive on the earth. From now on, your name is Sister Gourd and my name is Brother Gourd."

From then on, they started to build their house and plant their crops and had a self-sufficient life.

The god of Thunder was not angry anymore since he had his revenge. He believed that the brother and sister of the gourd had good hearts. To repay them, he often gave mild rain to the earth and never caused a terrible storm again.

Time flew by and the boy and the girl grew up. One day, the god of Taibaijinxing advised them to get married and bear babies. The brother agreed, but the sister couldn't accept the idea. She said she couldn't marry her own brother.

The brother was impatient and said, "The fairy is right. If we don't get married and bear babies, human beings will become extinct."

Though the sister could understand her brother, she still thought it was shameful to marry her brother. Therefore the brother said, "Let's light up a pile of firewood on top of two hills. If the smoke of the two fires combines into one, it means that we can get married. If they don't mix together, we can't get married."

The boy and the girl went to the tops of the opposite hills and set the fire there. The two fires were attracted by each other and became one ascending into the sky. They got married and had many children. This is how human beings multiplied. "The Smoke of Human Being" is from this story.

In the frescoes, the god of Thunder has the head of a hog, the body of a human being, birds' claws, and wings. The sound of thunder is created when the god spreads his wings, beats his twelve drums and flies in the sky.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

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The Eight Kings Who Fought for Buddha's Relics

South Wall, Cave 332, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-704

One day, Buddha Sakyamuni accepted the last obligation from Cunda on the Seven-Gem Bed under the two Bodhi trees near the king's city of Kushinagari. After giving his last sermon, the Buddha closed his eyes and had a rest. At midnight he peacefully passed away and entered everlasting Nirvana. The Ten Direction Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, the disciples and Buddha's mother all came to attend the funeral. His disciples cremated the body of Buddha. Some crystal relics of Buddha remained after the cremation.

The news that the Buddha had passed away spread quickly and many of his disciples, including monks and those who cultivated themselves, all wanted to possess a relic of the Buddha. The king of Kushinagari took advantage of being in a favorable position and rushed all the relics into his city and prepared to build a dagoba in which he would offer sacrifices. Then the kings of Allakappa, Vaisali and Magadha organized their troops and arrived at Kushinagari. They all wanted to receive a few of the relics of Buddha as a means to show their respect for the Buddha.

When they arrived at the city, all the troops got together and the kings decided to send a messenger to enter the city and tell the king of Kushinagari of their requests.

The messenger entered the city and met the king of Kushinagari. The king asked the messenger, "Why did the kings of the seven countries bring their troops to my country?"

"Your Majesty, Buddha is our teacher and all his disciples respect him very much. Now Buddha has passed away in your country, so we came and hoped that you could share his relics with us. We will take the relics back and

build dagobas to offer sacrifices. Every country regards these relics of the Buddha as priceless treasures."

"It's really a long way to our country. But I'm afraid I can't satisfy the kings' request. Because Buddha showed his honor and came to live in our country and acquired incomparable respect from my people, and since he passed away in my country, it's natural that the relics should be kept with us. This is the duty and responsibility of our people."

Then the messenger gave many reasons to ask for the relics of Buddha, but the king of Kushinagari refused them all. In the end, the messenger had no choice but to report the outcome of his meeting to the kings.

The kings were very angry when they heard the messenger's report. After some discussion, they reached a new agreement: send another messenger to talk with the king of Kushinagari. If the messenger was refused again, they would fight to get the relics of Buddha. Even if many people were killed, the kings still had to retrieve some of these relics.

When the king of Kushinagari received the ultimatum, he sneered at the messenger and said, "Just go back and tell the kings of seven countries that it's impossible to take the relics of Buddha away from me. I'm not at all afraid of them starting a war. I will fight against them to the bitter end."

Seeing that the king of Kushinagari did not want to share the relics of Buddha, the seven kings ordered their troops to lay siege to the city and attack it fiercely. They decided they wouldn't pull back their troops until capturing the relics. To fight back the enemies, the king of Kushinagari commanded his soldiers himself and defeated the other kings again and again. At that moment, a Brahman whose family name was Xiang arrived and gathered the seven kings together to persuade them to cease their attack. The Brahman said, "Your honorable kings, when Buddha was alive, he often told us that we should restrain ourselves. Forbearance is a good virtue of a Buddhist, and it's one of Paramita. Now that you all believe in Buddhism, and you often listen to Buddha's preaching, why do you kill other people in order to retrieve the relics of Buddha? Don't you think what you have done is an insult to the words of Buddha?"

"Of course it will be perfect if we could get the relics of Buddha without a war!" the kings said. "Please tell us a better idea of how to retrieve them!"

The Brahman responded, "In my opinion, it can't work if you ask the king of Kushinagari to give you all the relics of Buddha. How about if I ask him to divide the relics into eight portions? This way, every country could get one share and every one of you could take back your share and build the dagoba. The people of your country would all have a chance to cultivate their merits and virtues without disobeying the spirit of forbearance of the Buddha, and the war would end without any more people having to be killed."

The kings were very happy after they heard this idea. The Brahman then went to talk with the king of Kushinagari. He also thought it was a good idea and agreed with it.

The troops of the two sides retreated and the eight kings met together and decided to hold a ceremony to divide the relics of Buddha. The Brahman would host the event. Just as they divided the relics, the gods in the heaven and the kings of dragon also heard the news and came to the ceremony. They also asked for a share of the relics of Buddha. Therefore, the gods in heaven got one share,

and the kings of dragons received theirs. The relics of the Buddha were divided into ten shares and the kings took back their shares and built a dagoba for people to worship them.

This story was painted on the south wall of Cave 332 during the Early Tang Dynasty. One can see that in the background of the painting there's a mountain range, and a river running beside the mountains. Two armies are fighting fiercely beside the river and a wounded king has fallen to the ground after losing his horse. It's a very vivid battle scene.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

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Vaisravana Fought in the Sea

Cave 334, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-904

There is a long river in Khotan Kingdom, called the Khotan River. In ancient times, a monster dragon lived in the upper reaches of the Khotan River. The monster dragon constantly controlled the forces of nature and used its supernatural power to create different kinds of monsters to do harm to the country and its citizens. Since then Khotan fell into painful abyss. The people in Khotan lived bitter lives that in the past they had never had.

One day, a Taoist came to Khotan but nobody knew where he came from. Because his skin was as dark as coal, people called him Daub Charcoal Taoist. Everywhere he went he claimed that he could tame the monster dragon and ease the citizens' lives. The people believed him and followed him to the origin of the Khotan River, where he set an incense burner table and read the incantations loudly. As expected, he tamed the monster dragon and spoke to it saying, "If you can reasonably arrange the forces of nature and protect the people from bitter lives, I will spare your life and let the people offer you abundant harvests and livestock every year." When the monster dragon heard that the people might give him abundant offerings, it obeyed the Taoist's order and consented never doing bad things again. Since then, every time the year came to the end, all the houses contributed their harvest and livestock to the monster dragon and Daub Charcoal Taoist. After that Khotan enjoyed its finest natural climate, and every year they could reap a good harvest, which gave the people in Khotan good lives.

Many years went by. One day, a monk from India came to Khotan to speak of the power of Buddha. He tried his best to convince the king to believe in Buddhism, and taught that people may receive good or bad fortunes depending on their own behavior. Also, he convinced the people of Khotan to change

their beliefs to Buddhism through his preaching on Buddha's way of helping to relieve people from disaster. Many people learned Buddhist doctrine and gradually people themselves could express their enlightened views. And quickly some of them became monks. These people chanted everyday and lived simple lives. Because the people in Khotan believed in no other gospel besides that of Buddhism. Several years later, nobody gave any offerings to the monster dragon and Daub Charcoal Taoist.

At the end of the year when Daub Charcoal Taoist saw no offerings and was very hungry, he became outraged and thought in his mind, "Without my supernatural power to tame the monster dragon, how can the people in Khotan live such peaceful lives? Now you actually forget me and trust the monks' words. These people are ungrateful and fail to appreciate my kindness." Then he released the monster dragon to bane Khotan. Moreover, he jumped into the river to kill himself. After his death he became another evil dragon, and he also controlled the forces of nature and caused Khotan to become a boundless sea. People in Khotan escaped to the hillside and their lives were at stake.

One day Buddha Sakyamuni opened his magic eyes and saw to the north that Khotan was suffering a flood and had become a boundless sea. He thought to himself, "People in Khotan suffer such great disasters because they devoutly believe in Buddhism. How can I lose sight of their calamity?" And then he flew

on his cloud to the head of the Khotan River with Buddha Sariputra and Vaisravana. He said to his two disciples, "The evil dragon's previous life was Daub Charcoal Taoist. Before his death he cultivated himself according to Taoism for many years so he could have deep magic that would allow him to take many forms. To beat the evil dragon we must prepare ourselves for a decisive battle. Now we may have our lunch first, and get a little rest, then we can fight with him with full energy."

Buddha Sariputra begged for their meal. After the meal, Vaisravana himself washed the rice bowl along the river, and dirty water trickled down stream into the cave of the evil dragon. When he saw his cave was polluted, the evil dragon cursed, "Who has enough courage to pollute the river?" And then he flew out of his cave. When he saw Vaisravana still washing the rice bowl along the river, he became outraged. He held up his wolf-teeth stuff and began smashing downwards. Vaisravana hurried to lift his spear to meet the enemy head-on.

They fought vehemently from the ground to the sky and again from the sky to the ground. After several hundred bouts of fighting, the evil dragon felt his ability was not equal to his ambition and he could only ward off blows from Vaisravana. So he feinted about and escaped back to his cave.

After he played with his knife and fork, he thought to himself that Vaisravana had powerful feats, "If I cannot beat him from the power side, I may beat him through magic." So the evil dragon flew out of his cave and dug up a special hatchet. He incanted and an abrupt hill appeared on the plain riverbank. In the hill, a tall tree pierced into the sky and the stream flowed down. Vaisravana knew this magic was from the evil dragon, so he cast his golden spear to the high hill and said, "Magic!" The golden spear became a strong man with adamantine pestle in his hand and he aimed at the high hill, smashing down and crushing it.

The evil dragon turned into another atrocity, a scalper. The scalper's horns were like two daggers, its hoofs like four swords, and its eyes shone like two bright lanterns. It bellowed and rushed at Vaisravana. Vaisravana read a conjuration and became a golden-fur lion. Its mouth was as large and deep as a river, its eyes bright as sun shine, its teeth sharp like swords and its bellow like thunder. He swooped down at the evil scalper. The scalper was frightened when it saw the

lion and its legs felt paralyzed. It knelt to the ground and was eaten by the lion.

After the scalper died, the evil dragon became a fountain. The fountain was so clear that the bottom was visible. On the bank, flowers fully bloomed. Vaisravana knew that the fountain was another avatar of the evil dragon. So Vaisravana turned into a big elephant with six ivory horns and jumped into the fountain, sipping up the water with its nose. The evil dragon knew its magic was seen through and knew that its supernatural power was unable to beat Vaisravana. "If I can't escape I will be taken captive," the evil dragon thought to itself, so it turned into a small bird flying up to the heaven. Vaisravana at once turned into a lanneret, following the small bird closely, and captured it, putting it before Buddha Sakyamuni. The evil dragon had to show its true form. Vaisravana wanted to kill the evil dragon, but was prevented by Buddha Sakyamuni. Buddha Sakyamuni said, "The power of Buddha is tied to grace, so do not hurt its life." Buddha Sakyamuni held his golden bowl and said, "Magic! " The giant dragon longer than dozens of meters shortened to less than one inch and was covered by the golden bowl.

After taming the evil dragon, in order to save Khotan's citizens, Buddha Sakyamuni ordered Vaisravana to stab an opening in the sea with his golden spear. The flood flowed northeast to the desert. After the flood retreated, the people rebuilt their houses on the ground. They cultured fertile land and raised domestic animals, and peaceful life returned.

When Buddha Sakyamuni went away, he left behind Vaisravana to Khotan forever to guard and keep the citizens free from disasters. Therefore, Khotan became puissant and citizens there believed in Buddhism generation after generation. Vaisravana was esteemed as Lokapala of Khotan.

Among four Lokapalas, the northward Vaisravana was the most famous Lokapala. The number of its figures in Mogao Grottoes was the highest. Usually its figure was depicted in historical stories and in the pictures of combination of four Lokapalas, as well as in many individual pictures. He was evolved into the Tower-holding Lokapala in Chinese myth stories. Cave 334 of the initial stage of Tang Dynasty describes the story of Vaisravana who fought with the evil dragon in the Khotan Sea.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

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Ox Horn Hill

Cave 334, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-904

In ancient times, the expansive rolling mountains in south Khotan, dotted the landscape for hundreds of miles. More than 20 miles southwest of the city, two mountain peaks stood straight. Because their shapes were much like two sharp ox horns thrusting to the sky, people called the mountain Ox Horn Hill. Cliffs and chasms were everywhere. Even the strong could not climb up the hill.

In the canyon there was a fane, and inside the fane the Figure of Buddha was maintained. In the middle of the night, the joss usually emitted brilliant light, so the canyon shone like daytime and the rock and the trees could be seen clearly. At that time, the citizens of Khotan did not know about Buddha and his supernatural power, so they thought that the golden shining rays were the monster's black art. They were fearful and trembled day and night.

At that time Buddha Sakyamuni was not born yet, and it was the post Buddha—Buddha Mahakasyapa who preached the power of Buddha. Then, the Maharaja, the ministers and the citizens of Khotan did not know the power of Buddha, so they believed in Daub Charcoal Taoism.

A monk came to Khotan to preach the power of Buddha. When he held a wooden bowl begging for food, the people did not give him food but abused him, which meant he had no food to eat and no vestures to cover his body. At last he was so hungry and cold that he died. The divinity dragon guardian of Buddha learned of this and was furious, so he used his supernatural power to turn Khotan into a boundless sea. When the people saw their homeland turn into a boundless sea, and their homes and properties lost, complaints were heard everywhere but they did not know the reason and they endured the bitter lives.

One morning, a group of monks came out of the Ox Horn Hill fane. They dressed in cassocks and were barefoot, with tin staves and bowls in their hands

descended from the hill. The refugees strived to be the first to see the monks. The leading monk had a strapping stature, his ears drooped down far, his eyes were fiery, and his kind face had a brilliant smile. This was Sakyamuni, who in six years of self-torture became Buddha. Behind him, his disciples and Bodhisattva closely followed. They went near the sea and stopped. 363 circles of golden light circled Sakyamuni's head and the golden light covered the sea. Abruptly, a giant lotus flower came out of the sea, the flower stretching out with 363 petals. The 363 circles of golden light gathered up to the petals and formed a large pole of golden light. The large pole of golden light swirled and then the lotus flower and the seawater splashed to the sea bank. In a short time the golden light and the lotus flower disappeared.

The surrounding people stared at the scene. Soon the spectators began to praise the power of Sakyamuni and did not look down upon the monks any more. When Buddha Sakyamuni told the people why they came to Khotan, he asked, "Do you know why your

beautiful homes became a boundless sea? Why do you people have no home to return to? It is because you believe in Taoism and not Buddhism. The aged persons could recall that once there was a monk who came to your country to preach the power of Buddha, but he died from hunger and cold." Reminded by Buddha, the people remembered that the monk begging for food several years ago looked similar to these monks. They understood immediately that it was their ill treatment and behavior that led to the evil consequences and their bad behavior showed their disrespect to the power of Buddha. Then the people repented and knelt down near the sea to ask for the forgiveness from Buddha and pleaded to be released from their bitter life.

When Buddha Sakyamuni saw that the people wanted to give penance to Buddha, he preached the basic lessons of Buddhism to them and said, "The power of Buddha is grace to all of you, and Buddha's aim is to save all the flesh. The 363 circles of golden light irradiated the seawater and 363 petals of lotus flower means that from now on Khotan must build 363 fanes. The place where the golden light circled the lotus flower is the point where you must build your capital."

Somebody asked, "My holy master, how can we build the fane and our capital?"

"You need not worry about that," Buddha said, "We have come here to help you." After saying that Buddha ordered Buddha Sariputra and Vaisravana to open a gate to the sea and let the flood out. The seawater flowed away quickly, and after one day homes and trees appeared again in front of the people. Since then all the people in Khotan believed solely in Buddha.

On one side of Ox Horn Hill, there was a large grotto. In the grotto there was an arhat removed from daily life. He continuously waited for the future Buddha Buddha-ajita, to be born into the world. For hundreds of years, the royal household maintained him and never halted. Unexpectedly, one day the cliff fell down and the rock blocked the door. The king worried and hurried to assemble muscular soldiers to clean out the rock blocking the door in order to save the arhat. At that moment, suddenly a group of black wasps flew over and stung the soldiers. The soldiers escaped down the hill. Since then the door of the grotto never opened.

Because of the different kinds of magical events that occurred in Ox Horn Hill, people maintained the fane in the hill year by year and the Buddha's disciples overcame different kinds of hardships and danger pilgrimage to Buddha. The hill became the famous Buddhist holy land of Khotan.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

112

Bodhisattva Samantabhadra

West Wall, Cave 361, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Before Sakyamuni cultivated himself to Buddha, he was addressed as a Bodhisattva. In Mahayana, Bodhisattva is the second progeny position only under Buddha and above the arhat position. Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is usually on the right of Buddha Sakyamuni to serve him, and he sits on a white elephant with six ivories.

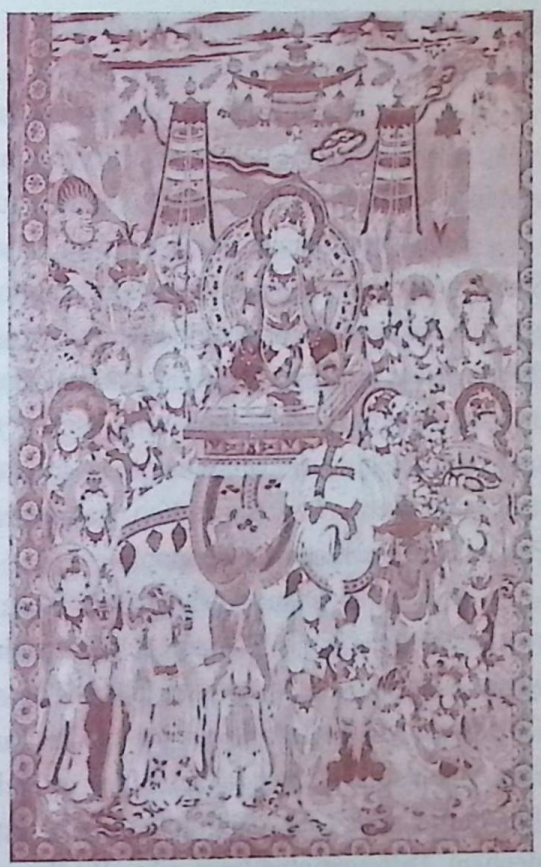
Emei Mountain lies in the south of Emei City, Sichuan. The altitude of its main peak, Ten-Thousand Buddha Tip, is as high as 3,099 meters. Because of the meandering nature of the mountains, people usually call Emei the most beautiful mountain among all the mountains. Emei Mountain is also one of the four famous Buddhist mountains. It is Bodhisattva Samantabhadra's preaching ground, and many stories about Bodhisattva Samantabhadra showing his presence widely circulated.

The Light Watching Station of Golden Peak of Emei Mountain is the best place to see "the light of Buddha." An old saying says that long, long ago an old man collected medicinal materials every year to save people who fell ill. One day, before morning broke, he had already climbed up to the peak. He suddenly found that among the rolling clouds, a seven-color light ring appeared in front of him. In the light ring, there was a man with a purple and gold crown and his body was dressed in a yellow cassock as he sat on a white elephant with six ivories. The man did not know who he was, but he thought the monk in the fane must know who the man was. He put down his medicinal box and ran to the Precious Palm Fane, and told the abbot in the fane what he had seen.

When the monk in charge of the Precious Palm Fane heard the story, he was overjoyed and ran out of the fane with the old man. He ran and exclaimed,

"My honored elder, the light ring you saw is the light of Buddha, the man sitting on the elephant in the ring is Bodhisattva Samantabhadra."

With these words, they ran up to the peak. The Precious Palm monk watched from a far distance and could only see a seven-colored light ring shining but not the picture of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. He asked the old man, "Is Bodhisattva Samantabhadra still in the light ring?"



"Yes, he is still there, you can't see him?" the old man asked.

The Precious Palm monk watched the old man, "It is not strange. You collect medicinal materials everyday and you may not know how many persons you have saved, so Bodhisattva Samantabhadra revealed his real picture to you. Although I am a vegetarian for Buddhist reasons, I could not do as many good things as you do. I can only see the precious light around the head of Bodhisattva and cannot see the real picture of Bodhisattva."

Since then, the peak was called the Golden Peak. The disciples and tourists usually go to the Golden Peak at midnight, waiting for the light of Buddha. They regard seeing the light of Buddha as a favorable symbol.

Elephan Washingt Pool in Meeting Immortal Fane lies in the north part of Emei Mountain. The water of the Elephant Washing Pool is three meters deep. Beside the pool there is a rocky white elephant. The sculpture is refined

and the elephant is like a living creature. This was Bodhisattva Samantabhadra's riding animal—a six-ivory white elephant.

Long, long ago Bodhisattva Samantabhadra came to Emei Mountain to preach Buddhism. He called on believers and crowds everywhere to widely spread Buddhism. Many people converted to Buddhism.

Bodhisattva Samantabhadra saw the beautiful scenes while walking along. Suddenly in the sky he found something shining in the hassock attracting people's eyes. He lowered his riding cloud to see what had happened there. In the pool, the water was bubbling. His riding animal, the six-ivory white elephant, jumped into the water, and began showering itself at once. Bodhisattva Samantabhadra sat aside watching the white elephant showering. After the elephant satisfied itself, they went away. Since then, people called the pool Elephant Washing Pool and built a fane near the pool.

Near the Elephant Washing Pool there is another rock like lotus flower, so it is called the Lotus Flower Rock. Once there was a white-haired great artist whose painting was extremely lifelike. The abbot of the Lotus Flower Fane in Emei Mountain invited the old artist to his fane to draw a figure of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra for attendance. After several days of hard work, the old artist drew a four-meter long picture of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra riding on the elephant. Differentiated from other Bodhisattva Samantabhadra pictures, this drawing illustrated Bodhisattva Samantabhadra riding the elephant while standing on a blooming lotus flower. The expressions of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra and the elephant were vivid. The artist told the abbot not to show the picture publicly until he left ten days later.

However, the abbot was too eager to see the picture, so the day the artist left he showed the picture in the temple. After seeing the picture all the monks praised the abbot's ability to find such a good picture.

On hearing the compliment, the abbot could not fall asleep until midnight. At midnight the abbot suddenly heard music playing in the temple. He hurried to the temple and saw golden light shinning in the temple. Bodhisattva Samantabhadra came down from the picture riding on the elephant. The elephant stepped onto the lotus flower, flew out of the temple and went up to heaven.

The old abbot yearned to go to heaven for a long time. When he found the opportunity, he rushed up and seized a petal from the lotus flower. While the lotus flower and Bodhisattva Samantabhadra rose slowly to the sky, the old abbot seized the lotus flower closely and he told to himself, "This time my cultivation could be consummated and I could go to the West Elysium, the Pure Land, to enjoy a happy life." At that moment, with a sound of "kaka," the petal he seized broke, and the petal and the old monk fell down to the hillside. The petal rolled on and on and it continued until it rolled to the Elephant Washing Pool. In a very short time the petal turned into a rocky lotus flower. That is the Lotus Flower Rock. If the old abbot obeyed the artist's words he could go to Elysium by showing the picture after ten days, but now he received the punishment of falling down from the lotus flower.

Among the Mogao Grottoes pictures, wherever there is a picture of Bodhisattva Manjusri, there must also be a Bodhisattva Samantabhadra picture on the opposite side. Their pictures are drawn mostly on the north and south sides of the Thousand-Buddha Cave curtain door. Some are also drawn on the two sides of the grotto door of east walls. Still some others are drawn on the north and south walls. The south side folding screen picture within the west wall cave showed Bodhisattva Samantabhadra's appearance in Emei Mountain in Cave 361 of the Mid-Tang Dynasty.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

113

Bodhisattva Manjusri

West Wall, Cave 370, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

Manjusri was born in the House of Guard City (Shravasti) of ancient India and he inherited a holy caste-Brahman. It is re-ported that he was born from his mother's right rib. After he was born, purple golden light emitted from his body, which lit the house brilliantly. He could speak as soon as he came to the world and had a quilt with seven-treasures covering his whole body. At the same time, ten lucky omens appeared in his family, such as amrita falling from the heaven, gold and silver fully filling in the container, and so on.

In Buddhism, Bodhisattva is the second highest position only under Buddha, and Manjusri is the leading Bodhisattva. Usually Manjusri and Samantabhadra are serving beside Buddha Sakyamuni. All Buddha's disciples regard Manjusri as incarnation of wisdom. He is talkative and disputable.

Once upon a time, great devotee Vimalakirti was sick and stayed at home, so Sakyamuni sent his disciples to visit him but no one dared to be the leader of the group. Only Manjusri went to Sakyamuni and asked to carry the "heavy load." He led the disciples to visit great devotee Vimalakirti and debated with him. He was praised by Sakyamuni.

Because of the great fame of Manjusri, in Mogao Grottoes there are many illustrated sutra pictures of him. Now in Mogao Grottoes there still are 132 places of illustrated sutra pictures of Manjusri.

The alias of Wutai Mountain (Wutai in Chinese means five stations) is Mount Qingliang, which is located in Wutai County in Shanxi Province. Because the mountain has five peaks and each peak has a flat tip, it is called Wutai, which is Manjusri's preaching ground. On Wutai Mountain, the temples

are grandly built and intensively distributed and the figures of Buddhas are carved elegantly. Each has a long history and many ancient empire kings went to worship. So Wutai Mountain was called the head of the four famous Buddhist mountains and many interesting stories about Manjusri's real body appearing to people were handed down.

In the Tower Temple of Taihuai County, there is a large white tower nine meters high. The base of the tower is square and it is a diamond throne; the shape of the tower is just like a large upside down bowl. Wind chimes are hung on the roof of the tower, and when soft wind blows, it sounds like a bell.

Long, long ago there was only a temple without a white tower. One year, a great drought swept across the Wutai area. There were no harvest and many people begged for food. The Tower Temple built a shed for saving the victims. The victims continuously came to the temple and a long parade formed in front of the shed. One day, a mid-aged woman with a dirty appearance and ragged clothes came to the temple. She led two children and a weak and thin dog. The beggar woman came up to the shed and squeezed in without following the line. She said weakly, "Abbot, give me a little food first." She held a shabby bowl with both hands and stretched toward the monk.

The monk gave an angry stare, beat his rice spoon several times and said,

"Go back to follow the line!"

The woman piteously entreated, "Abbot, please give me a hand and take care of us. Urgency confronts us but I cannot speak out, These two children haven't eaten any food for three days."

"All right, for the sake of the children, we may give you food first." The monk then gave her three shares of food. But the woman still stood there.

"Why don't you go?"

"My dog also needs a share."

"Many men cannot get a share. How could you think of your dog? Hurry! Go away!"

"The dog has its life. Don't the Buddhists speak of saving every creature in the world? How could you let a dog starve to death?"

The monk had nothing to say and involuntarily gave the woman one more share. Still, the women continued to stand there.

"Why won't you go?" the monk asked angrily.

"Abbot, you may not know this but there is a baby in my abdomen and it should have a share of food," the woman explained.

The monk couldn't endure anymore and angrily rebuked, "The baby in you abdomen is still not born. Why would it need a share of food? You are too greedy and tiresome."

The woman didn't show any fear and argued, "Abbot, please do not be so angry. The Buddha usually says that every creature is equal. How could you say my baby in my abdomen is not living? Why couldn't you give me another share?"

"The food is distributed according to people's heads. You go away! Next!" The monk brushed the woman aside.

The woman sighed and said, "All right, I could not have the food, but in order to thank the abbot's kindness for giving food to me, I will leave a bundle of hair." After finishing the words, the woman took out a pair of scissors from her sleeve and cut down a bundle of hair put it on the desk, and read an incantation: "Bitter melon is joined by bitter root; sweet melon is honeyed to all

parts of it; although I have cultivated myself over nature, I still arouse monk's dislike." After speaking the words she jumped into the sky and rose to half heaven, then showed his real body—Manjusri. The two children turned into two boys and the thin dog turned to a lion. Suddenly an auspicious light spread over the whole temple. Then everyone knew that the woman was the embodiment of Manjusri, so they knelt to the ground.

After that, the followers and the believers of Buddha built a white tower to attend the hair left by Manjusri when he showed his real body in the temple.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

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Lotus Boys

West Wall, Cave 383, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

Among the legion of murals of the Mogao Grottoes, the lotus boys add vivid atmosphere to the serious scene. Sometimes they stand on the lotus and sometimes they are jumping and playing about. There are also times when they are playing in the Seven-Treasure Pool. There is actually a story recorded in sutra about the origins of the Lotus Boys.

Long ago the hierarch that spread the power of Buddha in the world was called "Golden Light Buddha." At that time there was a powerful country that believed in Buddhism. It was rich, and the people there had ample food and clothing. The folk ways of the people were quite noble.

The name of the country's king was "Stateliness and Virtue." He pursued Buddhism dutifully and strictly obeyed Buddhist doctrines. When seeing the King of Stateliness and Virtue adhere strictly to Buddhist law, Golden Light Buddha decided to present the infinite power of Buddha to the king personally. Because of receiving this personal initiation from Golden Light Buddha, King Stateliness and Virtue's merits and virtues increased day by day as did his awareness of the world. As time went by, the king acquired many powers but still had not attained his final achievement.

One day, after finishing his court affairs, King Stateliness and Virtue went to the garden for a walk. The trees and grass in the garden were luxurious, the flowers bloomed, and butterflies flew to the flowers and birds sang on the trees. In the pure water pool, the water lilies bloomed just like beautiful fairies. King Stateliness and Virtue went across the small winding bridge and came to an eight-angle summerhouse in the pool. He crossed his legs and sat on the ground with his two palms pressed closely together. The king then recited a sutra and his mind entered into a calm Buddhist state.

At that moment, two large lotus flowers suddenly bloomed in the pool.

The branches of the flowers were thick, the leaves were as large as millstones, the buds within the flowers were fragrant.The two buds opened up slowly in the spring breeze and on each pistil stood a boy. The boys came into being from the holy powers of the king and were thus called the "Evolvement Living Boy". The boy from the right side of the bridge was called "Baoshang" and the left called "Baoyi". Seeing these two boys, King of Stateliness and Virtue was exultant and asked for the name of the boys.

Baoshang said, "Everything is empty in essence. Your Majesty, don't you know that in Mahayana the past power has been lost; the future power has not accrued; the present power is changeable?"

"My awareness level of the world is too low and I cannot understand what you have said. I hope you can explain it to me," King of Stateliness and Virtue said humbly.

"Now that you want to know, I will explain it to you," Baoshang said, "This law means that the past has been slipped away and disappeared. This means nonexistence; the past is empty. The future has not come to reality, meaning not happening. Not happening is empty. As far as the present, speaking from its essence, it is changeable every time and has no main body. No one can stick to one thing inflexibly. Everything has only one anonym but no true

content."

At that time Baoyi said, "From this point on, all names are empty and have no true content. The name is only a symbol. Even your name, my King, is contended and cannot represent your essence."

When King of Stateliness and Virtue heard these words, he was astonished and said to himself, "The two boys' understanding of the world is deep. Although I have already acquired a lot of supernatural power, compared with these two boys I am far behind."

The king was still excited, "Today I met you two and listened to your preaching on Mahayana law. This allows me to understand the world more clearly. I wish for you two oracles to direct me further and allow my thoughts to become more sublime".

Baoyi said, "Your Majesty, the lord of the world is Golden Light Buddha, and he knows everything in the world. Although you pay service to the Buddha devoutly, good luck still does not befall you; it is hard for you to receive your destined achievement. Today we met in the lotus pool. This is the result of your trial and cultivation of so many years and your good behavior towards the people.

Baoshang said, "Yes, now your chance is coming. We will bring you to see Golden Light Buddha to let him come to you!"

King of Stateliness and Virtue followed the two Lotus Boys and came to the palace of Golden Light Buddha. There before the Buddha seat, the three dutifully paid their respects to the Buddha while standing aside with two palms together.

Golden Light Buddha sat on the lotus throne vividly preaching Buddhist law and asked, "Who has questions? I can explain."

King of Stateliness and Virtue asked, "My lord of Buddha, I cannot understand how it is that I have dutifully paid respect to the Buddha half my life and attended the Buddha all through the years, yet I still cannot receive holy wisdom? Please give me direction."

"King of Stateliness and Virtue, you know the adherents of Buddhism are mainly divided into categories: clothes, food, residing, acting and remedy are things commonly associated with a wealth attendant; the other is the law attendant. The law attendant carries a kind heart, has good behavior, and is a

benefit to all. The common attendant can attain mundane achievements which make for a good life here and now. But these achievements cannot allow one to be released from the cycle of birth and suffering. Becoming a law attendant allows you to extricate yourself from the cycle of reincarnation and enter into Nirvana. In order to reach this state, you must seek wisdom from Buddha and release the flesh from this bitter life. By doing so, you can receive the wisdom of Buddha and arrive at eternal bliss."

After King of Stateliness and Virtue heard this he thought about all the things that happened to him throughout his life, the essence of Buddhist law and disengagement. He made up his mind to continuously cultivate himself and become disentangled from the world.

The two Lotus Boys heard the law preached by Buddha and immediately shed themselves of greed, deception and stupidity and made up their minds to assist all living things. When the two boys came to this decision, the ground shook and bright light shone. Bandsmen used different kinds of musical instruments to play music in the sky accompanied by beautiful dancers. Apsaras fairies, holding flower baskets, scattered fresh chromatic flowers. The fragrance refreshed people's minds and penetrated the entire world. All these deities came to congratulate the two boys with the utmost sincerity.

The Lotus Boys cultivated themselves sincerely and followed the Golden Light Buddha. Their wisdom increased greatly as did their powers. They preached the Law and were close with the people. Afterwards, the two boys became two famous and great Bodhisattvas: Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamahratpa Bodhisattva.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

115

Budda Preached Doctrine to His Mother

Cave 397, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

After Sakyamuni became a monk, he preached Buddhist law every where and exhorted all flesh to believe in Buddhism.

One day he thought to himself, "My mother experienced pain in giving birth to me, but seven days after my birth she passed away, and I cannot remember her face even now. Now I have become a Buddha and I should deliver the Buddhist law to her and let her disengage from life and death metempsychosis to repay her favor of giving life to me." After much thought Buddha exerted his supernatural power to find his mother's departed habitation. When he learned that his mother now lived in Kali Welkin, he decided to go to Kali Welkin to preach Buddhist law to his mother.

When Buddha arrived at Kali Welkin, he settled down under the Fragrant Omnipresence Tree in the Joy Garden and splendid golden light emitted from his body. The light brightly shone upon the three-thousand boundless universes which made all lives in the 33-level heavens joyous.

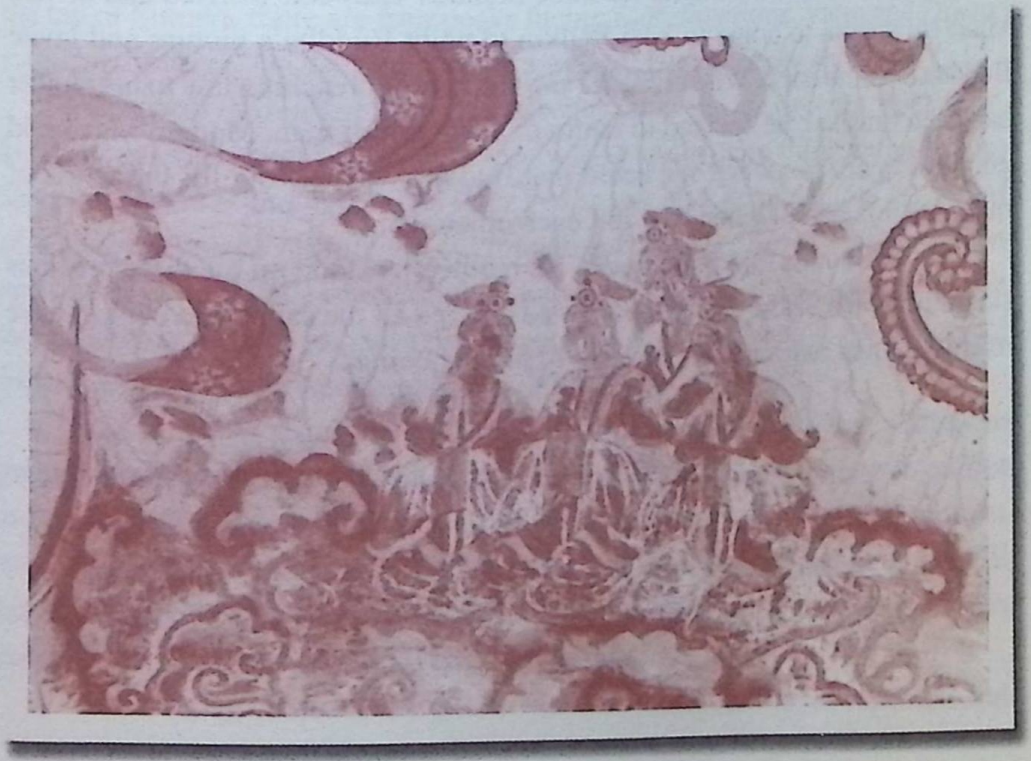
Although Buddha's mother Madam Maya was reborn in the highest 33-level heaven after she passed away, she still missed her own son. One day she saw the golden light shining in the Welkin and Manjusri Bodhisattva came to tell her that her son had already cultivated to Buddha and that he was at the 33-level of heaven to meet her. There was true joyfulness in her heart.

But on the way to the Fragrant Omnipresence Tree, Madam Maya doubted herself, "I left the land of the living after I gave birth to my son seven days and I did not even see him. The Buddha personally said he was my son, is that true? And how can I prove he is my son?" Suddenly she reminded herself that children are all brought up on their mother's breast. She thought to herself, "Al-

though my son only sucked my pap for seven days, he still had my blood. If Prince Siddhartha had my blood, hopefully my milk will flow into his mouth automatically." As she was thinking she had been under Fragrant Omnipresence Tree, her frock unfastened and milk from her breast flowed out naturally into the mouth of Sakyamuni.

Madam Maya was happy as she saw her son stood in front of her. It was not a dream, and it was reality! At that time in Kali Welkin music was playing and the apsaras were dancing joyfully. Flower leaves were spreading all over, and the deities were all coming to celebrate the meeting of Sakyamuni and his mother.

Madam Maya excitedly rushed to Sakyamuni to look into her son's dignified face. Sakyamuni was also excited on seeing her mother. After comforting each other, Sakyamuni asked his mother to sit beside him and explain the way of cultivating Nirvana. Sakyamuni said that life's happiness and pain were all shadows of a shade and he asked his mother to cultivate according to Buddhist law so as to escape the abyss of misery and gain release from life and death.



After Madam Maya heard her son preaching Buddhist law, she felt happy, just like a thirsty person finding water. She extinguished all the suffering fires in her mind. So she extremely admired the Buddha and knelt to the Buddha and devoted her attention to reading the sutra.

When the Buddha saw that his mother's Buddhist thoughts were pure and there was no problem in her mind after hearing the law, he further explained the Buddhist law to his mother. Before long, Madam Maya cultivated into the last achievement and released herself from the life and death metempsychosis. She said to Buddha joyfully, "Life and death are just like jails closely tied to people's lives. Thank you for your personal preaching of the law to me which made me become a pure Buddhist who can achieve Buddhist enlightenment." When deities in Kali Welkin saw that Buddha's mother had already acquired enlightenment they felt happy and read loudly together, "We wish all life will acquire disengagement!"

Time flew and it was three months since Buddha began preaching the law to his mother and all deities in Kali Welkin. In the world of man all the Buddha's disciples had not seen Buddha for three months. They felt worried and invited Maudgalyayana to come to Kali Welkin to paint Buddha's picture and invite Buddha to come back. When Buddha saw his task of preaching law to his mother had been finished, he decided to return to the world of man. Madam Maya said goodbye to her son when she heard that Buddha was leaving for the world of man. Their tears fell when they left each other again.

After Buddha said good-bye to his mother, he stood on the three precious sidesteps which Sakra-devanm-indra had ordered all the saints and evils to have made and then returned to the world of human beings.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

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Sakra-devanam-indra and the Highest 33-level Heavens

West Wall, Cave 401, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

Sakra-devanam-indra is the Law Guardian Deva in Buddhism who often tests Buddhist disciples' loyalty while also assisting the same people escaping from countless disasters to cultivate themselves into Bodhisattva and Buddha. According to Buddhist code, the highest place in the center of the universe is Sumeru. There are eight heavens surrounding Sumeru in the four directions of east, south, west and north with a total of thirty-three heavens. On the top of Sumeru there are four peaks facing four directions. Vajra and Dragon stand guard there. On the peak there is a welkin called "charity and visibility."

The host of the highest 33-level heavens, Sakra-devanam-indra, lives there. He has powerful magic and is extremely wise and able to think about a thousand of matters at one time. The Four Lokapalas also lie in the four directions of the mountainside of Sumeru. Surrounding the hill are Seven Fragrance Seas and Seven Gold Hills. Four continents surround the Salt Sea and people inhabit there. This is a story passed down through many years about the history of Sakra-devanam-indra and the highest of the 33-level heavens.

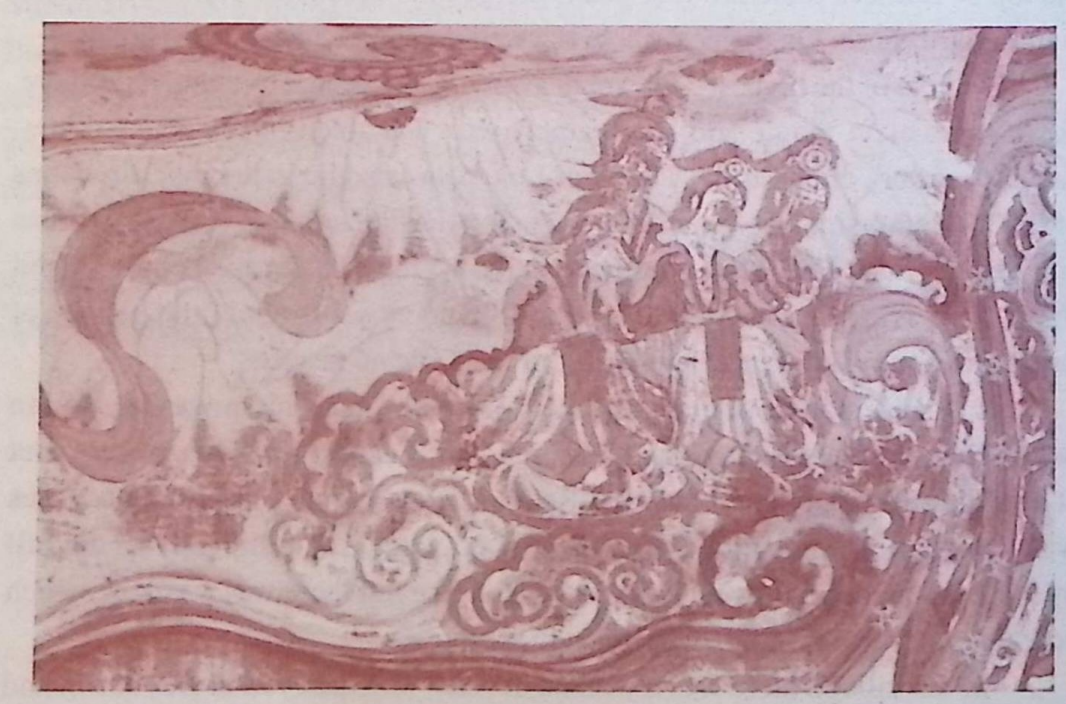
It is said that from ancient times Sakra-devanam-indra was already in possession of countless ages and had preached Buddhist laws everywhere. But at that time few people believed in Buddhism and burning incense in temples was not popular. In Jambudvipa, there was a large, sharp hill and on the hill trees flourished and flowers bloomed. Under the hill there was a village which contained several families who lived on farming.

In the village there was a woman devotee who believed in Buddhism and

cultivated herself at home. Her name was Maga. People usually called her Lady Maga. She was a gentle and virtuous woman. At home she was respectful to her parents and outside, this same respect was shown towards her teacher. Maga also treated her neighbors kindly and frequently took good care of the aged and the sick of the village. However, her family was not rich and thus unable to help raise people out of poverty. Every time when meeting beggars whose clothes could not cover their bodies, Maga would usually chastise herself and feel guilty because she had no money to give them even a little food.

One day, Maga went to the mountain to cut firewood and found a temple obscured by some bushes. When she entered the temple, she found that the walls were slanting, the main door was broken and weeds were sprouting out of all the cracks in the floor. The roof, with a number of holes, caused rain to seep in. Even the Buddha's statue lacked arms, legs, eyes and nose. The gold finish of the statue had been washed away, and the fresco behind it faded. Maga knew that this was a deserted temple.

On seeing the temple so dilapidated and the Buddha's statue eroded by



wind and time, Maga began to cry and shed many tears. Her sadness was like hot oil pouring into her heart. After returning home, Maga decided to repair the temple and restore the Buddha's statue.

Her desire proved challenging. Maga wanted to repair the temple but her family was too poor to support her undertaking. Although in peacetime she had saved some money through her own austerity, it was not enough to repair the temple. Maga instead realized that she must depend on those who were willing to work on the temple to do so out of generosity. Maga went from house to house to persuade people to contribute money to repair the temple. Her behavior received much opposition from non-Buddhists. One day the non-Buddhists were assembled together. They all began to laugh as Maga approached, "Everyday you run up and down to beg for alms like a lunatic. Is it because you're extremely poor? You hold to the idea of repairing the temple but won't you collect money for yourself? Buddhism has reached its death. How could a woman otherwise be allowed to repair a temple! If you can repair and rebuild the temple, the sun will rise from the west!"

The non-Buddhists all laughed at and mocked Maga, yet none of these frustrated her but only strengthened her resolve to repair the temple. Maga was neither angry nor annoyed. In a serious tone she said to the non-Buddhists, "You speak incorrectly. Buddhism is just like the rising sun in the east. Let us wager to see who is correct. What will you do if I am able to repair the temple?"

The non-Buddhists said, "Ok, let's make a wager. What's the bet?"

Maga said, "As you wish."

The leader of the non-Buddhists said, "Alright, if you can finish repairing the temple within 33 days, we will climb through your bestraddle; otherwise Buddhist devotees climb under our bestraddle. What do you think of that?"

Maga thought for a while and said, "Ok, it's a deal."

After saying those words, Maga turned and went away.

Maga dared to bet with the non-Buddhists because she already had an idea in her mind. Having experienced more than two years of begging, she had already contacted 32 women devotees of Buddha who often provided Maga with alms. They collected money and materials together. The 32 women plus

Maga made 33 devotees. They again asked their relatives who believed in Buddhism to repair the temple, so repairing the temple had already started.

On the second day after having bet with the non-Buddhists, work began on the temple. Maga and the other 32 women devotees cooperated and separately led the craftsmen to repair the temple. All the craftsmen worked with one heart and labored diligently, and eventually they finished the work within 33 days. The day the work finished, Buddhist disciples and a nearby crowd came to congratulate those who had restored the temple. Incense burned around the temple while bells and drums played together. The betting non-Buddhists fled and nobody knew where they were hiding.

Since its restoration, the 33 women devotees came to the temple everyday to burn incense, worship the Buddha, and recite sutra after finishing their housework. After they passed away, those women rose to the 33-level heavens. Having finished repairing the temple within 33 days, and receiving countless merits and virtues, the 33 women became the hosts of the 33-level heavens.

Maga, having first advocated repairing the temple, became a host of the 33-level heavens. In Buddhist sutras, she came to be called Sakra-devanam-indra. The deity was neither woman nor man but with a male appearance. The 33-level heavens were also called Kali Welkin. People imagined magnificent pavilions, palaces, gardens, fountains; lakes and many wonderful treasures to exist there. It was believed that only people in the world of man with great virtue could be reborn in the 33-level heavens.

After Sakra-devanam-indra became the leader of the deities of Kali Welkin, his main task was to guard Buddha and the sutra while also testing monks. He was also the ethical vindicator of heaven and the world of man. If the deva offended the heavenly codes and regulations, he could punish the offender; if a tyrant appeared in world of man and did harm to the people, he was able to remove the tyrant and regulate the world's affairs in lieu of heaven.

Translated by Yu Haomiao

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Superior Flowing Water Saved the Fish

Cave 417, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

Long, long ago in ancient India there was a superior called Flowing Water. He was a kind-hearted man and he was honest and tolerant to other people, moreover, he had brilliant leechcraft. People liked to call him live Bodhisattva.

Flowing Water had two sons, one called Water Hollow, and the other called Water Hidden. Both of his sons had handsome appearance and were kind-hearted. They followed their father to learn about the leechcraft so that they could also cure the sick. When Flowing Water realized that his sons could inherit his leechcraft, he felt happy and he initiated conversations with his sons about the leechcraft more frequently.

One day, Flowing Water and his sons visited a patient at home in the remote area far away from the town. On their way they collected some herbal medicine. But that day when they passed the bridge over the river, they saw only the dry riverbed. Suddenly dust blew across the main road. A flock of lions galloped to the riverbank. Immediately a flock of tigers, bears, foxes and tykes ran past. In the sky corbies and eagles sheltering the light were also flying downriver.

What was happening downriver? Flowing Water wanted to find out and he and his two sons ran downriver.

Normally on the lower reaches of the river, there was a lake but because there was no flowing water, the lake had already dried to the bottom. Flowing Water ran up to the lake and saw countless fish lying on the bed of the lake. All the birds and beasts were happy to see the fish and were attempting to grab the fish to eat. When Flowing Water saw the scene he couldn't help but cry. An old

man transformed from a tree and asked him, "Why do you cry with such sadness, my superior?"

"The fish are in pain and I can not stand here to see them suffering to death."

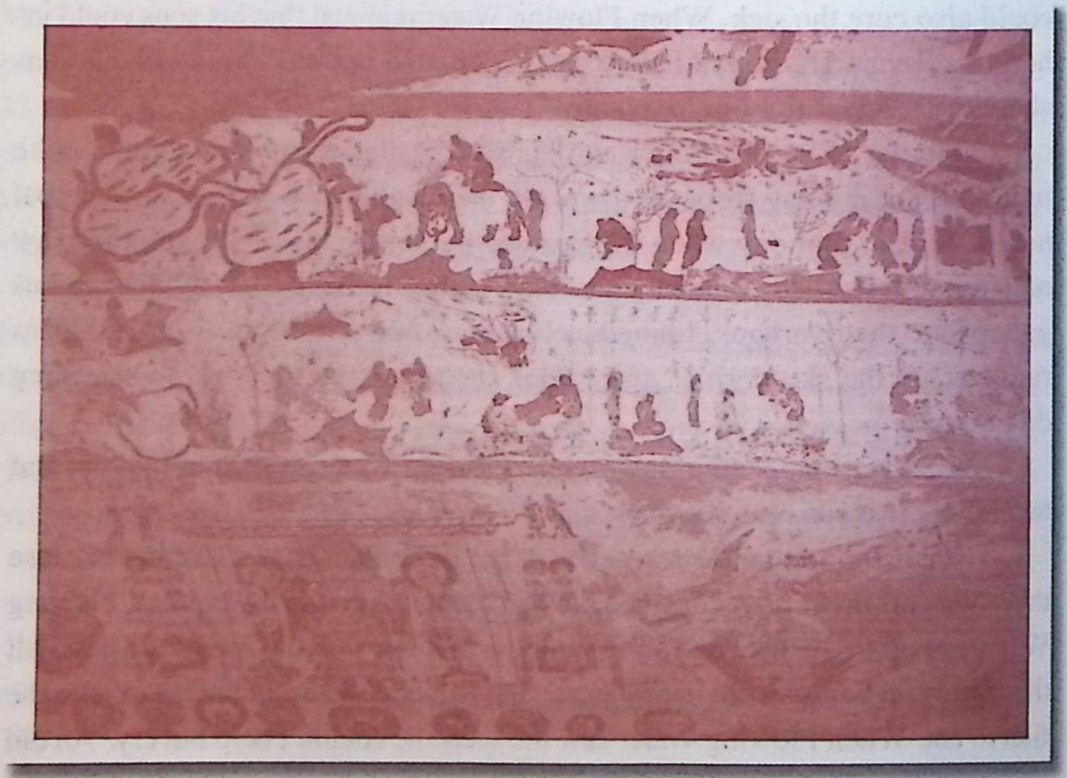
"Crying can help nothing, if you commiserate with them you must save them!" the tree eidolon reminded him.

"Yes, I must save them. How can I know the number of the fish?"

"One hundred thousand, at least. If they can not acquire redemption, they all die. Your name is Flowing Water, and you should embody your name and save the fish," the tree eidolon urged.

"I can not stand here and watch the fish die. I must manage to save the fish." Flowing Water told himself. First, he asked Water Hollow and Water Hidden to break some green tree branches and cover the lake bed to shade the fish from the burning sun. Then they needed to find the main source of water.

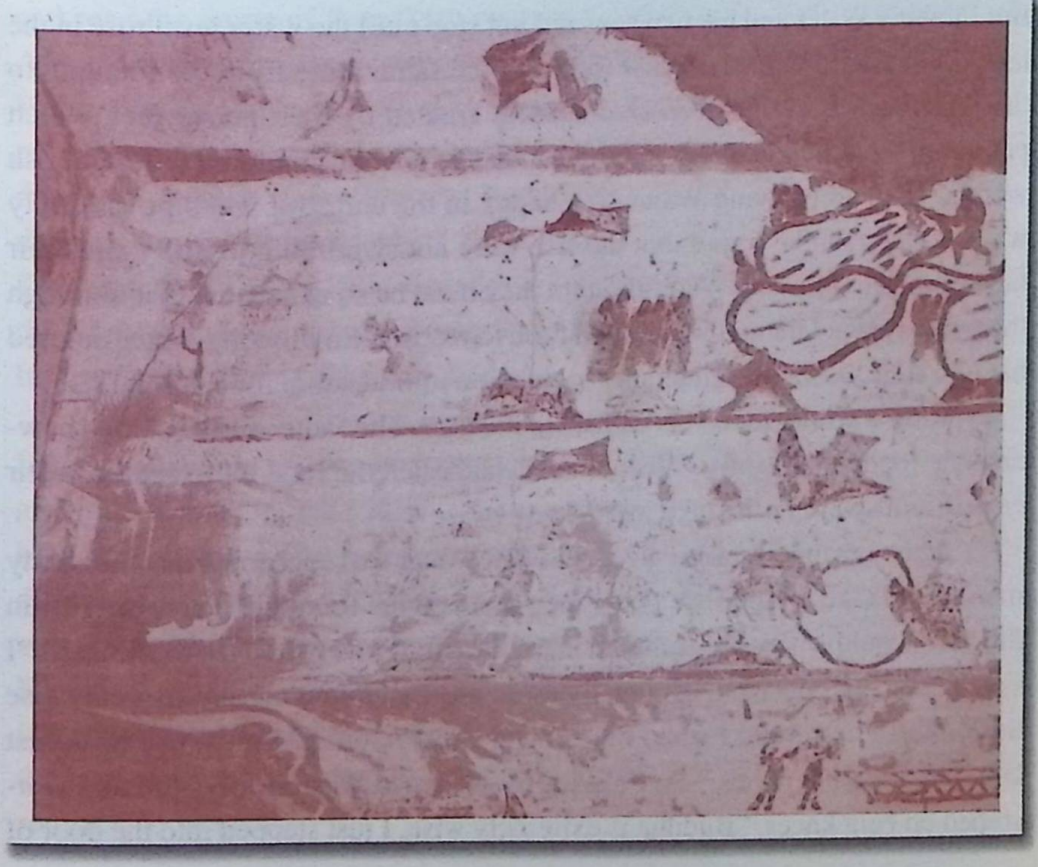
Flowing Water thought that there must be water upstream, so they ran



along the river bank. When they reached the waterhead they saw several strong people with atrocious faces building a dam to block off the water. They guessed that these people were building the dam to catch fish for money.

After Flowing Water understood what the sturdy men were doing, he thought to himself, "It is impossible to get them to break the dam to let the water flow. If we request for the feudal official to send soldiers, there will be a furious fight. What if somebody was wounded or tussled to death?" Then the two sons came to report that they could not find another source of water.

Flowing Water thought that in order to save one hundred thousand fish, the most important thing was to find water. The sturdy men would not let the water go, so animals might need to carry water to save the fish. Flowing Water led his two sons to the city to ask for animals from the king. When the king saw Flowing Water and his two sons gasping with sweat on their faces, he asked, "My



superior, what is the fuss?"

"Your Majesty, it is the most urgent thing!" Flowing Water said as he wiped sweat from his face. "Now there is a dry lake and the fish in the lake are dying. Moreover, under the burning hot sun birds and beasts are trying to be the first to peck at the fish. I promised to myself that I must save the fish. Please, my honored king, lend me 200 elephants and leather bags so I can carry water to save the fish." The king permitted Flowing Water's requests and ordered his servants to gather the supplies immediately.

Flowing Water and his sons immediately went to the royal stall to pick 200 lusty elephants and matched each elephant with leather bags for filling water. Then they went to the nearest fountain, filling the leather bags with water, they let the elephants carry the leather bags to the lake. Then they poured the water into the lake. They chased the elephants back and forth from the fountain to the lake. The water soon flowed on the dry lake bed and the fish were saved. But Flowing Water and his two sons did not stop until the water level rose in the lake. Because the 200 elephants followed the same route from the fountain to the lake many times. A deep channel was created by their heavy feet, which permitted the fountain water to flow to the lake. The one hundred thousand fish were saved and Flowing Water was happy in the end. But when he carefully watched the fish, he found that the fish were not swimming joyfully and their tails trembled. Flowing Water thought they must be so exhausted that although the water revived them, they needed food to recover. So Flowing Water ordered his two sons to ride the elephants back home to find some food for the fish.

After a while, food was carried to the lake. The father and two sons powered the food into the lake. When the fish had eaten the food they regained their energy and swam in the lake joyfully.

Although the fish were saved, Flowing Water was concerned that the sturdy men would take all the fish. If the men blocked the fountain water, the fish in the lake would suffer the same mishap. Flowing Water thought to himself, "I saved their lives once but eventually these one hundred thousand fish may lose their lives. How could I stand here and see that happen? I must use Buddhist law to release the fishes." So Flowing Water faced Western Elysium and worshiped on bent knees, "Buddha is extremely wise, I just stepped into the door of

Buddhism and I have not yet cultivated myself deeply. But I have a loyal heart to the Buddha and I am willing to save the creatures that need help. Please let me preach Buddhist law to the fishes and release them from bitter sea to be reborn to the highest 33-level heavens!"

After praying Flowing Water jumped into the water and explained the Twelve Links of Causation to the fish using easily understandable words. He urged them again and again that by reciting the name of Treasure Victory Buddha frequently they could make them reborn to the Elysium and disengage from all the tribulations. After that, the flock of fish converted to Buddhism and recited sutra everyday.

Flowing Water unloaded the heavy burden he carried when he saw the fish convert to Buddhism, and returned to his home with his two sons. During the following days they returned to practice medicine and saved sick people.

Back at the lake, the fish obeyed Flowing Water's words to recite sutra and read the name of Ratnaketu everyday and the fish died simultaneously. After they died they were reborn to the highest 33-level heavens—the Kali Welkin and became the Son of Heaven and lived a happy life. One day they remembered their pre-existence as fish and how Flowing Water had saved them during dangerous times. Flowing Water had preached Buddhist laws to raise them to the Kali Welkin, which allowed them to become the Son of Heaven. They wanted to express their gratitude to Flowing Water. After consultation, the Son of Heaven was reborn into one hundred thousand fish and rode the lucky cloud to the world of the man.

One afternoon Flowing Water was at home treating some guests. He joyfully drunk wine, and the wine made him so dizzy that he tumbled to the bed and fell asleep. On that evening, the Son of Heaven lowered the cloud to the home of Flowing Water, and seeing that he was asleep they did not wish to disturb him. They used more than one hundred thousand of pearls and agates and decorated shining tassel to put around his bed. Then they covered Flowing Water's body with beautiful fragrant flowers. The royal city music began playing and in the colorful sky fresh flowers flew. The Son of Heaven returned to the lake and once they died they also spilled many fresh flowers, and then they returned to heaven.

The people in the Royal City saw the supernatural scene and felt happy with that. They congratulated the Son of Heaven for blessing the city. When hearing the story the king felt strange, so the next day he beckoned Flowing Water to visit to the palace and asked, "It is reported that the Son of Heaven of Kali Welkin blessed your family, is that true?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, it is true."

"What kind of virtue do you have which made the Son of Heaven bless on your family?" the king bitterly asked.

"Your Majesty, I can only cure the sick man and I have no great virtue. During the midsummer a flock of fish met disaster and I borrowed from you, my king, 200 elephants to carry water to save the lives. I also preached law to them. It may be the fish died afterwards, they were reborn to the Son of Heaven and came to pay back my kindness for saving their lives and obliged fortune to the Royal City!"

Translated by Yu Haomiao

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Jataka of Prince Sudana and the Tigers

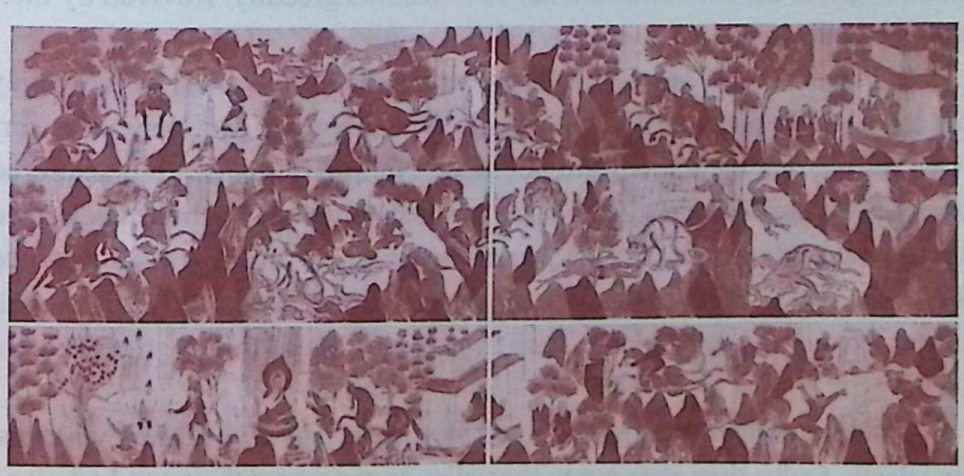
Ceiling, Cave 419, Sui Dynasty, 581-618

One day, three princes rode out to hunt. They came upon a valley lush with trees and fragrant flowers and with a river of sweet water. The brothers sat quite still, admiring the beauty of the valley. Suddenly, not far from them, the princes spotted seven tiger cubs frisking in the grass around their mother.

The tigress was thin and gaunt and she had not eaten for so long that her milk had dried up. The mother tiger stared hungrily at her cubs as they tumbled and rolled around her trying to get at her dry teats.

The eldest brother felt sorry for the tigers but he didn't know what to do about their plight. The middle brother suggested they return to the palace and bring back some fresh meat for the mother tiger.

"If the mother tiger can be saved, her milk can flow again," he argued,



"then surely her cubs will also live."

The princely brothers agreed to try and turned their horses back towards the palace. Just as they started out, the youngest prince, whose name was Sudana, reconsidered. It would take them half a day to get to the palace, he thought, and another half day of travel for the return trip to the valley. In the meantime, he reasoned, the mother tiger would have starved to death. There and then, Sudana decided that he would give his own life in order to save the tigress and her cubs.

"Wait a minute," he called to his two brothers, "I really feel too ill to make the trip back to the palace. I'll just wait here and rest until you return."

When his two elder brothers had galloped out of sight, Sudana removed all of his clothing and laid down in front of the big tigress. Tentatively, the tigress licked at Sudana's naked body but she drew back when she discovered that he was still alive. Sudana laid still for a while longer but still the tigress made no attempt to eat him since she preferred dead meat.

Finally realizing his error, Sudana jumped up and climbed the hill above the tigress and her cubs. Once there, he found a length of bamboo that he fashioned into a sharp knife. Holding the splinter of bamboo in his hand he stabbed himself in the throat and, as his blood drained away, he fainted and toppled over the edge of the hill, landing right in front of the tigress and her cubs.

The tigress pounced on Sudana's dead body, eagerly devouring his flesh, gnawing on his bones and lapping up his spilled blood. In moments, the tigress's breasts began to fill with milk and her cubs suckled greedily. Revived by their meal, the tigress and her seven cubs left the valley.

In the meantime, the two brothers were on their way back to the valley with a load of fresh meat from the palace. When they arrived, they were surprised to find that the tigers were not there. Nothing remained but scattered bones and a heap of clothes. They knew immediately that the clothes belonged to their younger brother and that it was his bones strewn in the grass. It dawned on them now what Sudana's real reason for not returning with them to the palace was. He had stayed behind to sacrifice his own life so that the tigers would live.

The king and the queen wept when they heard the news of their youngest son's death. Sadly, they rode out to the valley to see where their son had given

his life to the tigress and her cubs. When they saw his clothes and bones, they were overwhelmed by grief and cried as though their hearts would break. In memory of their son Sudana, the king and queen decreed that a pagoda be built on the very spot where he had made his sacrifice. In a few days the pagoda was completed and Sudana's clothes and bones were reverently stored inside.

Since that time on, year after year and generation after generation, people from all over the place have made pilgrimage to Sudana's pagoda and to burn incense and worship Buddha.

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Unicorn Immortal

East Wall, Cave 428, Northern Zhou Dynasty, 557-581

In ancient times there was an immortal who lived in seclusion high in the mountains of Varanasi. One pleasant evening at the time of the Moon Festival, the immortal walked out to admire the full moon hanging high in the clear sky. On his way home, he paused to admire a beautiful doe standing beside the small pond behind his house. Overwhelmed by his desire for this glorious creature, the immortal ejaculated into the pond. When the doe bent to quench her thirst, she was impregnated by the immortal's sperm.

The doe returned on the day of the Moon Festival of the following year to the pond, where she gave birth to a male child with hoofs instead of feet and with a single antler sprouting from his head.

Hearing an infant cry, the immortal came out of his house to investigate and saw the infant and the doe. Immediately, he realized that this child was his own son. The doe ran off, leaving her offspring in the care of the immortal.

Ten years passed while the immortal nurtured and instructed his son. The boy worked diligently under his father's tutelage. He became proficient in the Eighteen Grand Buddhist Scriptures and learned to sit in meditation. He also mastered five magical spells, which were so powerful that he was able to control the weather. His fame spread and he was known as Unicorn Immortal.

One day, as Unicorn Immortal returned from visiting a friend, he was caught in a rainstorm. The steep, winding mountain path was made even more treacherous by the heavy rain, and Unicorn Immortal slipped and slid and scrambled on the path, injuring his hoofs. He struggled onward, becoming more and more enraged by the storm. When he finally arrived home, Unicorn Immortal began to chant a magical incantation that would stop the rain for 12

years. Unicorn Immortal's weather magic was so powerful that the Rain Dragon was totally subdued.

As the years passed, rivers and streams dried up, forests and crops withered, birds and beasts fled the area. The countryside was ravaged by drought. Concerned about the disaster afflicting his kingdom, the king called upon his generals and ministers to advise him on this urgent problem. One minister told the king about Unicorn Immortal's incantation to stop the rain. But this did nothing to calm the king. He became even more worried than before.

"If this drought does last for 12 years, my people will die. It will be the end of my kingdom," he said with tears in his eyes. The king beseeched his senior officials to speak freely if they had any ideas that might end the drought.

"If we could weaken his magical powers, surely it would rain again," suggested one minister.

"But where," the king responded, "are we likely to find anyone capable of doing that?"

"It would be a simple matter of posting a handsome reward," the minister replied. "Your Majesty could offer half your territory to whoever could bring Unicorn Immortal to his knees."

"I will think about what you suggest," the king said.

The king considered the minister's idea carefully. At last he made up his mind to try the suggestion and commanded an imperial edict to publicly announce a reward of half his kingdom to anyone who could end the drought.

A beautiful maiden named Shantuo came forward to accept the challenge. She approached the king and his imperial court and asked, "Is Unicorn Immortal a human being or a monster?"

"A human being, but born of a doe," came the reply.

"Ah, that's all right then," she said confidently. "He will soon come into my hands. Your Majesty, your worries are over," she boasted, "for I will soon ride the wicked monster back here to you!"

Shantuo then requested the king to provide her with numerous jewels, 500 homes and carts and 500 of the most beautiful women in the kingdom. She loaded each of the carts with colorful fruit-shaped dumplings made with herbs and spices and with wine that was as sweet and mild as spring water. Led by Shantuo, the caravan made its way to the mountain where Unicorn Immortal lived. When they arrived at Unicorn Immortal's home, Shantuo and the women built themselves straw tents and settled in. The 500 beautiful women dressed themselves in green leaves and wild grasses to look like forest nymphs.

When Unicorn Immortal returned home he was very surprised to see all the straw tents and the alluring forest nymphs who occupied them. He was only too pleased to accept their invitation to visit their tents, where he was graciously received and given a plush bed to recline upon. The beautiful nymphs surrounded him with fragrant flowers and gave him the sweet wine and fruit shaped dumplings. They flattered him with their coy conversation and Unicorn Immortal happily gave himself up to the pleasures of wine, women and songs.

"I have never tasted such delicious food," he exclaimed.

"It's a special holy food prepared just for you," Shantuo explained sweetly.

'I've never seen such gorgeous women as you," said Unicorn Immortal as he gazed around at the enchanting nymphs. "How did you become so beautiful?"

"It's the result of the delectable food and wine. Would you like to remain with us always?" Shantuo asked.

"There is nothing I would rather do than remain with you," responded Unicorn Immortal, intoxicated with joy.

"We would be honored if you would bathe with us," Shantuo suggested in a soft voice.

"That's a wonderful idea," he replied with enthusiasm, "just what I need to remove the sweat and dust of my travels. We should bathe immediately."

By now Unicorn Immortal was completely enchanted. All the taboos and commandments of his Buddhist training were forgotten and before long, the usual peace and calm that surrounded the pond was replaced with the sounds of splashing and laughter as Unicorn Immortal frolicked in the water with the naked nymphs. As she bathed him, Shantuo's delicate hands played over Unicorn Immortal's body, seducing him and arousing his desire. Consumed by the fires of lust, Unicorn Immortal swept Shantuo into his arms and carried her into one of the straw tents. The rain began to pour down.

For seven days and nights, Unicorn Immortal indulged his senses and appetites, dissipating his magical power and vitality. As the days passed, the skies gradually cleared and the rain eased up and finally stopped completely.

Soon they had consumed all the ambrosial food and wine that Shantuo and the women had brought with them. The nymphs brought him some ordinary fruit and water, but Unicorn Immortal rejected them as tasteless and bland.

"I can't eat such unpalatable food," he said truculently. "Get me something sweet and succulent."

"You have eaten all the delicacies we brought," Shantuo pointed out. "If you want some more, you will have to go down the mountain to the city."

Unicorn Immortal readily agreed with Shantuo's proposal and the next day he and the beautiful women left the mountain. When they could see the city on the horizon, Shantuo suddenly stopped walking and sat down on the roadside.

"I am bone weary and can't take another step," she lamented.

Distressed by her condition, Unicorn Immortal lifted her onto his back and walked on with his burden. Before they had gone much further, Shantuo slid from his back and surreptitiously motioned for one of the beauties to summon the king from his imperial court.

Then she turned to Unicorn Immortal. "It's awfully uncomfortable on your back," she groaned. "It would be easier if I rode on your shoulders." Uni-

corn Immortal was happy to accommodate her and placed her up on his shoulders.

Excited by the news from Shantuo's messenger, the king and all his courtiers came out to greet Shantuo and the 500 beauties.

The king was filled with enormous respect and admiration for Shantuo as he saw her riding high on the shoulders of Unicorn Immortal. When everyone was back inside the imperial court, the king fulfilled his promise of reward and offered Shantuo half his kingdom to rule as her own.

But Shantuo declined the king's reward. "My purpose in stripping Unicorn Immortal of his powers," she explained, "was not so I could ascend a throne and rule a kingdom. My purpose was to command the rain so that there could be a bountiful harvest and thus happiness and well-being for all."

Henceforth, Shantuo was revered by everyone throughout the nation.

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Killed While Picking Flowers

East Wall, Cave 428, Northern Zhou Dynasty, 557-581

A long time ago, Buddha Sakyamuni preached Buddhism in Lonesome Garden in Shravasti. In the neighborhood of the monastery, there lived an elder named Fan Zhi. The man was very famous far and wide since he was rich, and he owned a thousand acres of fertile land, numerous cattles, cows and horses, and possessed countless valuable treasures.

This man had a son late in life. Since he was getting on in years, he was very eager to have grandchildren as early as possible. In order to realize his dream, he urged his 20-year-old son to get married on a beautiful flowering day in spring. The bridegroom was very handsome, and the bride was lovely with her beautiful face and elegant figure. The happy couple had a honeymoon, which surpassed all expectations.

One day, hand in hand they went to the courtyard garden for a walk. The expensive garden, with its beautiful views, was a nice place to relax. It was delicately designed with a fine layout and it was extremely spacious. Walking around, the bride and bridegroom were completely indulged in enjoying the beautiful sceneries—the elegant well-decorated pavilions, craggy rockeries, a pond with dark green water, the grasslands with blooming flowers, the busy flying honeybees and the lovely singing birds.

When they came to a pear tree, the couple stopped. The tree was very tall and strong. The blooming flowers and fragrant scent overwhelmed the bride. She just had to have some of the flowers. She said to her husband,"I do love the fragrant lily-like flowers. Would you please pick some of them for me? I'd like to decorate our room with them."

On hearing this, the bridegroom looked up and observed the tree carefully.

Then he said reluctantly to his wife,"Wife, this is an old tree. I am afraid it is too tall for me to reach the flowers from the ground. Wouldn't it be a pity if I climbed up to the top of the tree and had my new clothes torn? Look, there are many beautifully blooming flowers on the lawn. Look at the peach blossom. Wouldn't you like a bunch of them?"

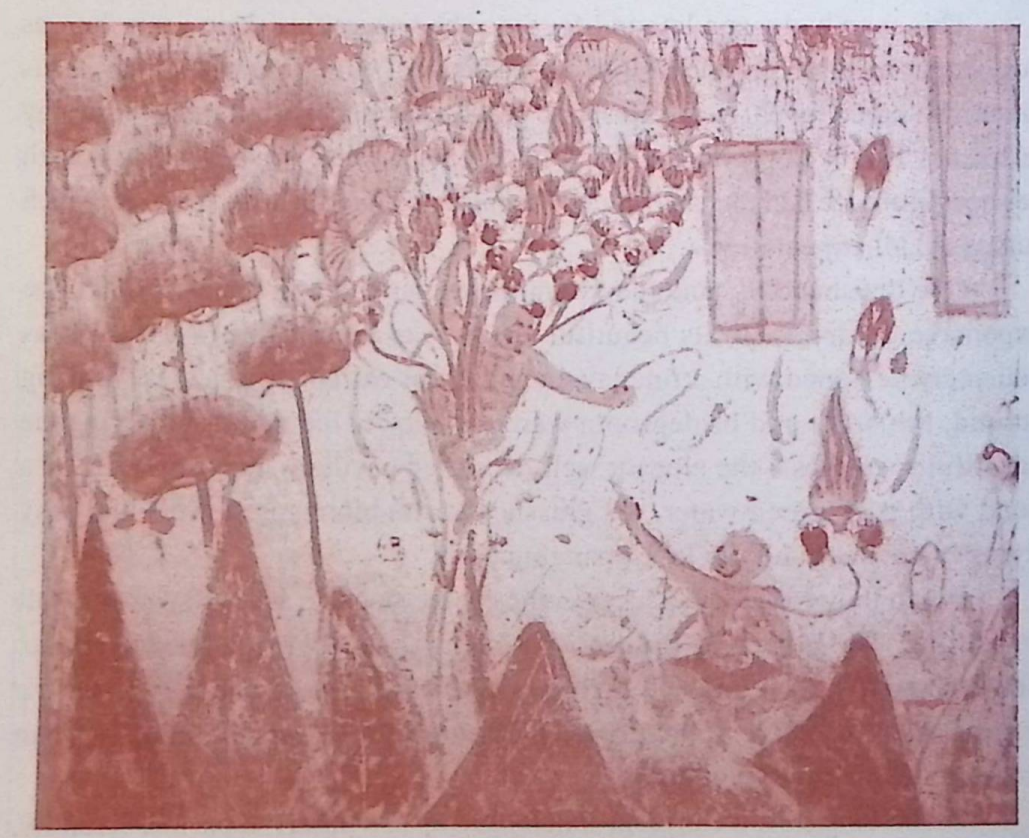
"Oh, no! It is pear flowers that I like," the bride responded. "I hate the others. Please climb up the tree."

"Well, it's...so hard for me...without the help of ladders." The bridegroom was still reluctant to climb.

"Fine!" shouted his wife. "You refused my request to pick some flowers. What does that say about your love for me?"

"Wife, it is really very dangerous," the husband said in his defense.

"As a strong man, you do not dare to take up the challenge of climbing a



tree. How shameful!" the bride said sneering at him.

On hearing this, the husband could not stay calm any more. Immediately, he took off his clothes and climbed up the tree very quickly, just like a monkey. On his way up, he broke some of the flowers, and threw them down to the bride. "Now, catch them!" he shouted at her. Unfortunately, the wife was not quite satisfied with the flowers she had received. She frowned and said to her husband,"These are the flowers grown in the middle of the branches which have little chance to be exposed to the sunshine. They haven't fully bloomed. Look at the flowers at the top. They are bathing in the sunshine. They are blossoming beautifully! I'd like to have some of them. Pick them."

"Ok, I'll do that."

In order to make her happy, the husband moved up to the top of the tree. The pear branches are originally frangible in nature, to say nothing of an old tree. In this case, it was very dangerous. As soon as the bridegroom reached the top and stood up ready to pick the flowers, the branch suddenly broke unexpectedly. Crying in alarm, he fell down to the ground on the head first.

The husband laid there motionless. Seeing this, the wife threw away all the flowers in hand and held the husband in her arms. "Husband, Husband!" she called. No response at all. The wife could not help but burst into tears. At that moment, someone had rushed to inform the couple's fathers of what had happened. As soon as they heard the news, the old couples, together with the whole family, ran to the garden where the son was lying. They were so worried about the son that they immediately sent for a highly skilled doctor to save his life. After diagnosing the patient, the doctor shook his head and said that the son was dead. There was no way he could help. The only thing to do was to prepare for the funeral.

Losing his son at his old age, the elder man was heartbroken. He could not get rid of his deep sorrow after the funeral. Another person who suffered from extreme pain was the bride. She was even more distressed at losing her dear husband because it was her own fault. She regretted and often blamed herself for what she had done. The old couple and the bride often cried out of sadness. Far into the night, the sound of crying was so miserable that it would make everyone who heard it feel distressed.

One night, while the Buddha was delivering Buddhist sutras to his disciples in the monastery, he heard the sound of crying from the neighborhood. The sound was so loud that it disturbed the lecture.

"Who is he? The cry is so mournful," asked the Buddha.

"It is our neighbor, the elder man Fan Zhi," replied the disciples.

"Why is he crying so sadly?"

"His son died when he was trying to pick flowers from the top of a tree. He had been married for just seven days."

"Oh, so it's our neighbors. We should console and guide them. Let's go to see them tomorrow."

The following day, the Buddha and his disciples arrived at the elder man's home early in the morning. They expressed their sympathy and offered their condolences. The Buddha also lectured them on Four Noble Truths, and persuaded them to relieve themselves of their sadness.

The Buddha's words enlightened the elder man. He stopped crying and resumed his courage. But still, he couldn't help asking the Buddha a question,

"Buddha, as a follower of Buddhism, I've been doing good and accumulating merits since the very first day I believed in Buddhism. Being a devout disciple, why should I encounter such a bad experience?"

"It's a retribution for your misdoing of the former life," said the Buddha.

"Please show me in detail. I am curious about what had happened in my former life."

"It is a long story," said the Buddha. "Countless lives ago, there were three classmates who were as close as blood brothers. One beautiful summer day, they went to the countryside together for a spring outing. When they arrived at a beautiful orchard garden full of flowers and blossoms, they saw a young boy playing. The boy was carrying a bow and some arrows with him. At the time, there were many birds on the pear trees covered with beautiful white flowers. The birds were singing loudly, and it bothered them.

"The three said to the boy, 'Hi! You look very strong with your bow. We are wondering if you have good shooting skills.'

"The boy responded, 'Please trust me. Every shot of mine can hit the target.'

"On hearing this, one of the three sneered at him,'Come on. Don't brag,

young man.'

"'Don't tease me. I mean it,' said the boy seriously. 'Please choose a target for me. I promise you if I fail to hit it, I will become the son of one of you later.'

"'Ok. Let's make it a deal. Shoot that bird, then,' said the man, pointing at the top of the pear tree.

"The young man shot at the target bird, and he did hit it. The bird fell down to the ground dead.

"Seeing this, the three applauded together. 'Excellent!' they praised. Later, they went elsewhere to enjoy themselves.

"Can you imagine the fate of the three later? Let me tell you. After experiencing numerous rounds of happiness and sufferings, the three reached their different destinations. One of them is now in the Elysium enjoying his happiness, another one is living in the sea as the Dragon King. The last one is you, who is now living in the temporal world with matchless riches and honor. The boy mentioned previously was formerly born in heaven. He was the Son of Heaven. Later, he became your son again. He lost his life when he was picking the flowers, but this is not incidental. That is the retribution for his misdoing—killing the bird in his former life. You don't need to feel sad about your son's death; it was his destiny. After his life ended, he became the son of the Dragon King. The day he died was the exact birth date of his new life. By this, he fulfilled his promise to be the son of you three people in turn."

On hearing this, the deep sorrow of the whole family vanished. Immediately, the elder man hosted a banquet to thank the Buddha and his disciples. Later, the elder man had his hair cut and became a monk. After years of cultivation following Buddhist doctrine, he became an arhat.

Translated by Lu Tong

121

The Flower Scattering Fairy

West Wall, Cave 437, Northern Wei Dynasty, 442-534

According to Buddhism, secular devotees are the disciples who believe in the power of Buddha after having accepted commandments and gone through the ceremony of proclaiming themselves as Buddhists. They are not monks or nuns. The male and female secular devotees, together with the monks and nuns constitute the main part of Buddhism believers.

Once upon a time, there was a famous secular devotee called Vimalakirti in Vaisali City. One day, he was reluctant to attend the Buddhist Service on the excuse of being seriously sick. Buddha Sakyamuni decided to assign his disciples to see him. Unfortunately, no one dared to take the lead. So Bodhisattva Majusri took the role. Together with some disciples, she made a great effort and went to visit Vimalakirti.

As soon as they arrived at Vimalakirti's home, Bodhisattva Majusri and Vimalakirti started their discussions concerning Buddhist scriptures. However, the discussions finally turned into an argument. All the people present were sitting there silently, just listening to what they were talking about. No one dared to take part in the conversation.

At that moment, there came a beautiful fairy. She just kept moving about quietly in the room. She was the only person who made noises. Seeing this, Sariputra was unhappy. Even though he had become an arhat after cultivation, there were still some shortcomings in his mind. He regarded men as superior to women. He reckoned that women would never be the center in man's world. He was sure that there must be some differences between male and female. Thus he felt disgusted at what the fairy was doing at this grave moment. He thought it was flighty of her to do this.

In fact, with her super power, the fairy knew very well what Sariputra was thinking. In order to correct his wrong thinking, she began to scatter flow-

ers in the air. Suddenly, the fragrant colorful flowers flew everywhere. But the strange thing was that whenever the flowers fell upon the body of the Bodhisattva, the flowers would fall on the ground within a second, while the flowers which fell on the bodies of disciples like Sariputra would stick to them like glue. No matter how hard they tried, they could not remove the flowers.

Seeing him scurry to remove the flowers from his body, the fairy asked, "Dear Sariputra, why do you do that?"

"It is not necessary to have the flowers on my body. What's more, it is against the rule of Buddhism," he replied.

"No. Please do not think so. As a matter of fact there is no distinction if those flowers are on your body or not. It is your mind which makes the difference. If you follow Buddhism and cultivate yourself according to it, you should never have the thought of difference. Is it right?"

What the fairy said made the so-called wise man, Sariputra, very embarrassed. He was rendered speechless so he changed the topic immediately, "How long have you been here in Vimalakirti's place?" he asked.

"I came here from heaven, and have been here for 20 years."

"You are so wise and intelligent. So why don't you change yourself into a male?"

"Well, it has taken me twenty years to impersonate a female image. Now

I am a female. It is great. Now you come and ask me to turn back into a male. What do you mean? A magician has created an image of a phantom by magic. Then someone asks him to transform the female image into a male one. Do you think that is a good question?"

On hearing this, the Sariputra felt ashamed. He had no suitable words to speak in response. Anyway, he still held prejudice against females. The thought that women were born inferior to men, and female would never become Buddha was still in his mind.

The fairy knew that the thoughts in his mind were not easy to change. So next, she exerted her super power and changed Sariputra into the image of herself, while changing herself into that of the Sariputra.

Seeing this, the Sariputra tried very hard to resume his original image, but he failed, even with his utmost effort. So he said to the fairy, "I do not know why I became a fairy. I do want to turn back to my former state, but I failed."

"Dear Sariputra, let me tell you this. If you can transform your female image to a male one, then every woman in this world can do that. Just like you,

now that all the women are in the female image, they are not really female at all. Remember that the Buddha told us, 'Everything is normal. There is no distinction between male and female, superior and inferior. They are all in the equal state.' Do you remember?"

"Thank you very much for your kind help," said the Sariputra. "Now I feel so ashamed of myself. Yes. I must admit that I do not have the key of what the Buddha told us since I still have prejudice against women in my mind. I promise you that I will get rid of that thought in the future. For this, I do apologize."

Upon saying that, the Sariputra closed his hand and bowed down to show his respect. Still, he was curious about the fairy and her super power. He wondered why the fairy was so powerful and what she had done that contributed to that power.

In fact, other people present were curious about this, too, but no one has the courage to ask the question.

The secular devotee Vimalakirti could tell the people's state of mind very well at any moment. So he said, "Dear friends, please don't look down upon this fairy that was scattering the flowers. She is a donor of 9.2 billion Buddhas. She's got the power to make many wishes come true. What's more, she can present herself in any image she needs to educate all the flesh. Yes, she is right. In fact, all the things created are equal by nature; there is no distinction between male and female at all."

This explanation made everything clear. All the people present started to show their respect to the fairy. Just at the moment, the flowers that once clung to them fell off from their bodies.

Translated by Lu Tong

122

The Resurrection of Shanzi

Cave 438, Northern Zhou Dynasty, 557-581

In a tiny village in Kingdom of Kayi, there lived an old couple who had no children. The old man and the old woman wanted desperately to go up into the mountains to become Taoists but, because they were both blind and had no son or daughter to lead them into the mountains, they could not go. The old couple was very saddened by their plight.

Unknown to them, Sakyamuni was aware of their wish and how sad they were because they couldn't realize their desire. To help them, Sakyamuni decided to be reborn as their son. The old couple was pleasantly surprised to have a child at this time in their lives and they named him Shanzi.

Time passed and Shanzi grew into a fine, strong youth who was well-behaved and treated his parents with love and filial obedience. He knew that the wish to enter the mountains to study Taoism continued to weigh heavily on the minds of his elderly parents so he offered to carry them into the mountains. The next day Shanzi lifted his parents onto his back and they set off for the mountains. High up on the mountain, Shanzi built a comfortable house for the three of them. Whenever his parents were hungry, he scoured the mountainsides for a great distance around to gather wild fruit for them to eat. His parents were content and peaceful, practicing Taoism with all their heart and soul. Shanzi, too, was content. He enjoyed listening to the birds singing in the forest; he frolicked with the sheep, fawns and rabbits that inhabited the wood. When his clothing was worn out, he made new garments of deerskin.

One day, the king of Kingdom of Kayi went deer hunting in the mountains. Suddenly, the king caught sight of a deer dashing through the trees ahead of him and he shot an arrow. But he missed, so he and his servant began chasing the deer. The deer ran through the forest easily avoiding its pursuers until it came to a river. The deer hesitated on the river bank just long enough for the

king to loose another arrow. This time the arrow found its mark and the deer let out a painful howl.

The king had not shot a deer at all; he had shot Shanzi who, dressed in his deerskins, had gone out to fetch water for his parents.

Astonished by the deer's cry of pain, the king ran to the riverside to investigate. There was Shanzi clutching his wound in agony. Looking up at the king, Shanzi said quietly, "People should honor all living creatures and not take their lives."

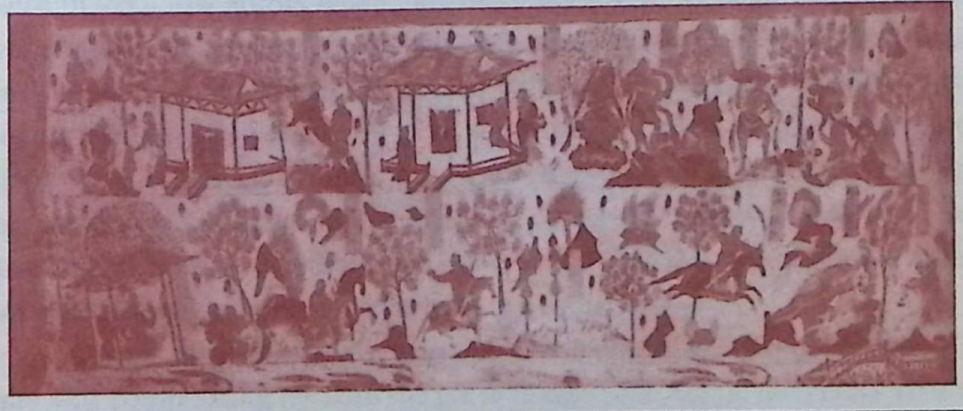
No sooner were the words out of his mouth than a howling gale blew through the mountain. Dense, black clouds blanketed the sky and blocked the light. Thunder boomed. Branches, ripped from the trees by the ferocious winds, crashed to the ground.

Deeply remorseful, the king said to Shanzi, "I am the king of this country and I beg you to forgive me. I will search out the best healers in my kingdom to treat you and save your life."

"I forgive you," Shanzi said in a feeble voice. "If I die, there will be no one to care for my aged parents and they will be unable to continue to practice Taoism."

The king knelt down beside Shanzi. "If I cannot restore you to life," he said, "I will not return to my imperial palace. I will remain here to serve and care for your aged parents myself."

When Shanzi heard the king's words, he closed his eyes and his life slipped



away. The king went to the old couple's cottage and, with his eyes brimming with tears, he knelt on the ground before them.

"I have come here to be punished," he wept, "Your son has been killed by my own arrow as he fetched water from the riverside."

Overcome by this horrible news, the old man and the old woman swooned and fainted.

When he had revived them, the king told the old couple what Shanzi had said and of his own promise to be their son in Shanzi's place. The king then led the old couple to the riverbank where Shanzi lay dead. With their hands, they lovingly caressed his body and tears of grief streamed from their blind eyes.

The gods in the heavens were moved with compassion for the old couple's loss and grief. They took a magical panacea and blew it over the tragic scene so that some of it trickled into Shanzi's throat and some blew into the old couple's eyes. Miraculously, Shanzi began to stir as his life was restored and the old couple's eyes began to clear. Before long, Shanzi was fully alive and whole again and his parents could see clearly.

At that very moment, the winds stopped howling and the dark clouds disappeared. Flowers blossomed and sent forth a delicate fragrance; birds sang sweetly in the trees. From that time on, Shanzi and the king pledged eternal brotherhood and together they served the old Taoist couple. The mountain valley where they lived was filled with joy and peace forever after.

123

Willow Avolakitesvara

West Wall, Cave 449, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-704

A long time ago, Avolakitesvara came to the Central Plains of China from Putuo Mountain and begged from door to door in the disguise of an old lady to find out about the situation and folkway. She found that the virtuous people here were fewer than the evil-minded ones. They were avaricious, bellicose and committed all kinds of crimes. If things went on like this, thousands of disasters would crop up. Therefore she was determined to stay here and give directions to these fatuous and stupid people.

Living in a cave Avolakitesvara located Taishi Mountain as a place to show her presence and magic power. One night, she had a dream. In the dream, she talked to the local people, "Avolakitesvara will show her presence and power on Taishi Mountain soon, save the people from disasters and release the souls of sincere people from purgatory. Please don't miss this favorable chance."

All the people overheard what Avolakitesvara said in their dreams and the people discussed the dreams the previous night everywhere, waiting for Avolakitesvara to release their souls from purgatory.

Drought reigned in this area. The plants were going to die. The local people were in very low spirits when they faced the severe drought, and the people were in fear and tension. An old lady with white hair came to beg in the village, but she was treated coldly. It seemed that nobody wanted to help this dirty beggar. She begged from morning till night, but got nothing to eat, so she sighed, "Now I understand why this place is suffering from drought. People here are too inclement in their mind and do nothing good. There was nothing in my stomach after I begged all over half of the village. Disasters will drop from the heaven if people don't have benevolence and mercy!"

After hearing her words, many people in the village thought that the old lady was complaining because she got nothing to eat. An old man in his sixties,

whose family name was Liu, considered her words reasonable. He thought the masses were all expecting to see Avolakitesvara recently, but nobody had ever paid attention to this old lady beggar. Based on her words, was it possible that she was the avatar of Avolakitesvara? Therefore, he stopped the old lady and said, "According to your opinion, the reason why there is a drought is that people are not virtuous. I'm wondering whether we could be rescued from this disaster."

"It depends on whether the masses will be penitent and make a fresh start!" the old lady said. "As long as all the people realize their guilt, the power of Buddha is merciful enough to end the disastrous."

Old man Liu was sure that the old lady was Avolakitesvara after hearing her words. He sat on his knees and said, "My Avolakitesvara, I'm a common person with naked eyes and almost missed the chance. Please show your mercy and rescue this place from drought with your amrita. If this disaster is eliminated, all of us will join in Buddhism and worship Avolakitesvara."

"You are the only one kind-hearted person that I can find here. But, the reason why other people are obstinate is that Buddhism has not been preached here. In order to make the masses to have a belief in Buddhism, I'll show my presence and power on Taishi Mountain at three quarters past twelve tomorrow, conjuring rainfall to eliminate the drought. Please tell all the common people to come and have a look. I'll release the souls of the masses from purgatory and persuade them to believe in Buddha."

Old man Liu told the masses about his meeting with Avolakitesvara. People were uncertain of his words, but they were overjoyed when hearing Avolakitesvara would show her figure and rescue people from disaster by conjuring rainfall to eliminate the drought. The news flew over the counties and towns.

The next morning, families burned joss sticks, and all the people worshiped. The masses including the male, the female, the old and the young were all raising their heads and waiting for Avolakitesvara to show up. When it was three quarter past twelve, a piece of white cloud rose from the top of Taishi Mountain, then scattered away. Suddenly, a way appeared in the middle of the cloud, leading to the top of Taishi Mountain. The white cloud became the lucky cloud in five colors, on which Avolakitesvara was standing. Then she landed on the top of the mountain leisurely. She was in her cassock and with a hat on her head. There was a jade vase in her hand, with amrita and willow branch inside. When seeing the golden body of Avolakitesvara, the masses were busy sitting on their knees and reading, "Respectful Avolakitesvara, please rescue us from disasters!"

At the time, Avolakitesvara dipped a piece of willow branch into the jade vase and scattered amrita towards the east, west, south and north of the sky. The lucky clouds in the sky were seen to be gathering, with thunder roaring and cold wind blowing. Then the rain was pouring down in no time, and it didn't stop until the land was well saturated with water, followed by the appearance of the golden sun. The inspired people didn't notice when Avolakitesvara left.

The timely rain washed the land. The grain turned green and the common people were rescued. In order to show their endless appreciation, the masses believed in Buddha sincerely. Old man Liu encouraged the believers to donate to the establishment of a temple where Avolakitesvara showed up on Taishi Mountain. They also molded a statue of Avolakitesvara in the temple, and turned the name of the cave in which Avolakitesvara located herself when she came here into Avolakitesvara Cave, worshiping all the year round.

124

Prince Sudana Was Ready to Give Alms to the Poor

Cave 454, Song Dynasty, 960-1279

Long ago, the kingdom of Yapa was ruled by a king whose son was named Sudana. The word Sudana means ready to give. The young prince was very intelligent, highly trained in reading, painting, calligraphy, riding and shooting and became very versatile in both administrative and military affairs.

One day, Sudana left the royal palace on an outing. As he rode along, he saw many of his kingdom's poor on their knees begging beside the road. They were very lean and haggard, and wore shabby clothes. He realized that in this land of plenty there were still people who were in extreme misery.

Sudana could not bear to see such scenes, and sadly returned to the palace, but even the gaiety of palace life and the delectable foods could not restore his spirits.

When he dined with the king he had no appetite, and the king, seeing that his son had a gloomy countenance, asked him what had happened.

"I went out of the town on an outing and I found many poor beggars, blind, crippled, men and women. My heart is saddened. You told us the people of our kingdom do not have to worry about food and clothing, but actually the masses live in dire poverty. I wonder if you would allow me to give them some aid," the prince said in a very gentle way.

"Whatever you wish to do, I will be supportive of you," the king promised.

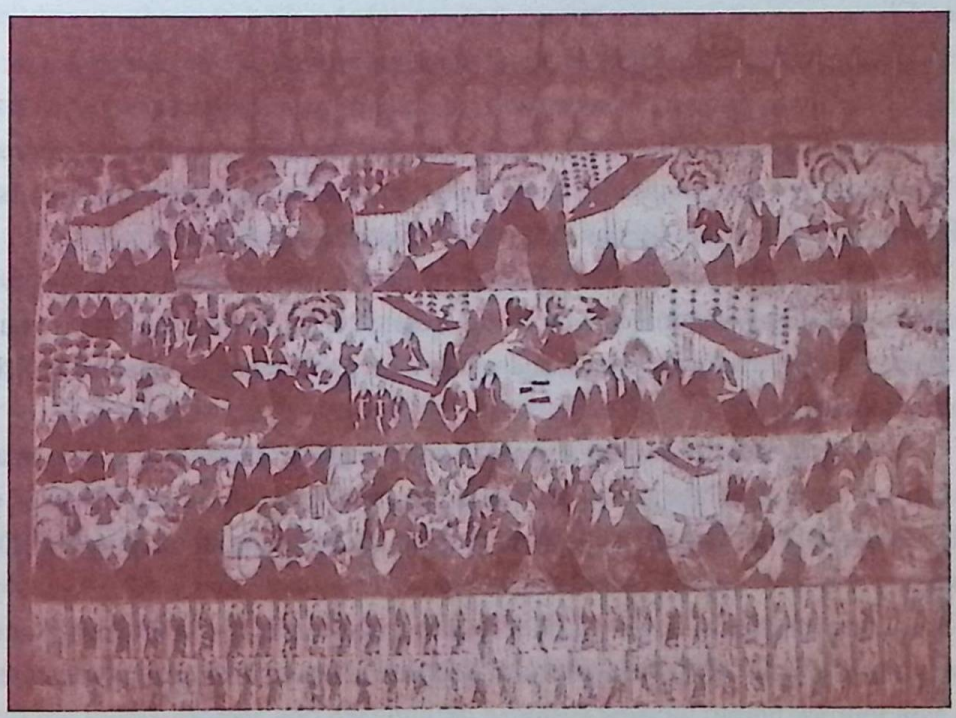
"I want all the treasures of the national storehouse," said the prince, "and I will pile them up at the city gates to satisfy the poor."

"That's a good idea! I agree to your request," the king said wholeheartedly. Prince Sudana cheered up and immediately piled food, clothes, jewels, silver

and gold at the main gates and the people were given anything they wanted. Soon word of his benevolence and generosity spread across the land, and the people came from different kingdoms to claim the treasures. People who lived in remote mountains also came, not only asking for food, but also wanting to visit Prince Sudana in person. All their needs were satisfied by the prince and they returned home with the fruits of their visits.

The news traveled far and wide. When the king in a neighboring country learned of Sudana's generosity, he was quite excited. He thought his opportunity had come. He was a king of wicked ambition and he was thinking of launching a war to realize the expansion of his territory. Since the kingdom of Yapa was defended by a huge white elephant called Suadya, no country was able to triumph over Yapa. The king of the neighboring country summoned his ministers and eight military advisors to the palace to discuss how to take advantage of the situation in Yapa.

"I have long desired to swallow up Yapa. But it was impossible for us to



succeed in a war because of the giant white elephant. The elephant is so powerful and brave. However, the opportunity has come. The prince of Yapa is now giving alms to the people. Who would be brave enough to go there and ask for their white elephant?"

The eight military advisors stood up and volunteered, "We will disguise ourselves as beggars and cripples so that they will have to have pity on us."

The king of the neighboring country was very pleased and provided them with food and money and they started out on their journey.

The eight made the long and difficult journey and finally arrived in Yapa. They approached the city guards begging for help, pretending that they had not had anything to eat for several days.

"We are from a faraway kingdom and are hungry. We must see the prince immediately."

The guards felt sympathy for the blind and crippled people limping on walking sticks. They quickly went in to inform the prince of their arrival. The prince welcomed them in person and asked them if they preferred treasures to food."

"No, no," said the group leader, "your benevolence is beyond bounds. It is well known that you have set a good example of generosity. Look at each of us, blind and crippled. It is hard to say if we will be able to walk back home. Please give us your white elephant to ride on. That will satisfy our needs." Tears came out of their eyes as they pleaded with Prince Sudana.

"I am terribly sorry. The white elephant is our country's treasure. My father values it as his life. How can I give it away? If I give the elephant to you, I will lose my father's love and trust, and will be a person condemned by history," the prince apologized.

"But you have promised to give people whatever they desire. You must keep your promise," the group leader said stonily. "And if you do not give us the white elephant we will stay right here and die before your very eyes." The others were now wailing before the prince.

Sudana hesitated a while and then made up his mind. He ordered his guards to put on the gold saddle, and gave the elephant to the visitors and wished them a safe journey home.

They bowed deeply and started off on the back of the elephant.

The king of Yapa was shocked and annoyed by the news. "What shall we do without the elephant? We will be bullied by the others if we do not have it. According to the national law, people who give away the ordinary elephants of the country should have their feet and hands cut off. Giving away the white elephant is punishable by having their eyes gouged out or by beheading," the king was now murmuring to himself, "My poor son, how can I save you from this desperate situation?"

However, the ministers tried to explain to the king, "Sudana is a kind-hearted prince. He is actually helping the people. How can we punish him this way?" The king thanked the ministers and, adopting their suggestions, banished his son from the city and gave him 12 years to repent his serious faults in the deserted, remote, thickly forested mountain.

The next day, Sudana took leave of his parents. Thousands of people came to see the prince off. He expressed his gratitude to the people and asked them gently to go back to their homes. Then, placing his wife Mandi and their children in the cart, he headed towards the mountain.

When they were just out of the town, a Brahman came up and begged the prince for something. Since the prince did not have any treasures, he gave the Brahman the horse. Then he put his daughter and son in the cart. He pulled the cart, and his wife pushed it from the rear.

They walked with difficulty. But a short while later another Brahman came up and asked for food and clothing.

"I'm deeply sorry. I want to help you from the bottom of my heart, but I now have nothing to offer you," the prince sadly pointed out.

"Don't you think you wear more expensive clothes than I do?" the Brahman said sarcastically. "I think you could give me your clothes."

Prince Sudana took off his expensive clothes and gave them to the Brahman, and then, put on the Brahman's shabby clothes and continued the journey.

They stopped under a tree and were having a rest when suddenly another Brahman appeared before them, asking the prince for something. Sudana gave him his wife's clothes and his children's clothes without hesitation.

After innumerable hardships, they finally arrived at the foot of Mount Dnatalokagiri. They climbed up the mountain and met a monk who was already 500 years old. The friendly monk approached the family and asked why they had come to the mountain. After Prince Sudana told him the misfortunes he had been through and the stories of what had happened on the journey, the monk was filled with deep veneration.

"I have heard of the prince of Yapa, Sudana, many times, but I have never seen him. Today I am fortunate indeed to talk to the prince. You are a man of great virtue and benevolence. I am sure that you'll soon attain enlightenment and then I will become your first disciple." The monk was very happy to receive the prince as his honored guest.

He helped the prince choose a piece of land and the family settled down. From that time on, Prince Sudana followed the monk to educate himself according to Buddhist doctrine.

Not far from the mountain, in the kingdom of Kuru, lived a Brahman. He was black-hearted and cruel in nature and painfully ugly and disgustingly monstrous in appearance. He was so ugly that his features could lacerate your eyes if you looked at him. He was indeed an evil spirit.

He was now already 40 years old and had just taken a wife. One day, his wife went to the riverside to fetch water. Some young women took pity on her.

"Your husband is an abominable evil man. Why did you marry a man like him? A fresh flower is in cow dung."

She was very embarrassed when she heard this. She cried and hurried home empty-handed.

"Do you know what people said about you? I am very shamed by your appearance. I'll not go out until you buy me a slave. If you are not able to buy a slave for me, I will commit suicide." Tears flowed from her eyes.

The Brahman said, "Wait! I guarantee I can get a slave for you in 10 days." He had learned that Sudana was now at Mount Dnatalokagiri with his wife and children. So he started off at night, heading for the mountain. He overcame lots of difficulties for he walked with a limp. Finally he reached Mount Dnatalokagiri.

He ran into a hunter first and asked him where the prince lived. The hunter knew why the prince had been exiled to the mountain and when he learned that

this ugly, evil man was eager to see the prince, he became enraged, thinking that here was another Brahman asking for something from the prince. He vented his anger on the Brahman. He tied the ugly man to a tree and gave him a good thrashing.

The Brahman realized that he might be beaten to death, so he cried out and fabricated a story.

"The king of Yapa is now seriously ill with longing for the prince, so the chief minister sent me here to ask the prince to return home."

The hunter was deceived by the Brahman and quickly untied him, begging his pardon. Then he showed the Brahman the correct way to where Prince Sudana was living.

The prince welcomed the Brahman warmly and invited him into his hut. He provided the visitor with water, fruit and food. As soon as he finished all the food, the Brahman told the prince where he was from, how poor he was, why he was there and how kind the prince was.

"Everyone knows that you are always willing to give alms. Your generosity is known far and wide. I am over 40, but still have no children. We are dying to adopt children in order to provide for us in our old age and bury us. So I came all the way from my kingdom for your children," said the Brahman with a pitiful expression in his face.

The prince turned to the children and said with an ache in his heart, "Son and daughter, this Brahman traveled thousands of miles for both of you and I have promised to give you to him. Please go with him."

"We have never seen such an ugly man before. We won't go with him. Wait until mother comes back."

The Brahman whispered to the prince, "I must be going now. Their mother won't allow me to take the children if she comes back."

Then the Brahman tied the children's hands together and pulled them away.

Mandi returned home with wild fruits and found the children were not at home as usual. She realized something must have gone wrong with her children. When the prince told her that he had given the children to the Brahman, Mandi burst into hysteria. She said, with tears in her eyes, "Oh my dear children, you

are going to be slaves far away and I will never see you again." She fainted, falling to the ground. When she regained consciousness, she wailed and whined and repeated a short chant over and over again.

On their way to the kingdom of Kuru, the Brahman thrashed the children violently with a leather whip. The poor children were beaten black and blue. Arriving at his home, the Brahman arrogantly bragged to his wife, "Look! I got two slaves free of charge."

"Whose children are these?"

"Prince Sudana's."

His wife was utterly shocked.

"You are a beast. How dare you bring the grandchildren of a king here? Did you beat the children like that? Don't you have any pity on them? You will be beheaded if the king knows what you have done to the children," his wife scolded.

The Brahman was frightened by his wife's words. He decided to take the children to the market to sell them.

He traveled to the capital of Yapa with the children. The people of the kingdom recognized the king's grandchildren, so one minister hurried to inform the king. The king was shocked by the news and ran out of the palace to see his grandchildren. The sight of the children's ragged clothes and their beaten faces made the king collapse to the ground.

The Brahman was paid a handsome sum and the ministers sent him on his way. The king now wrote a letter to the prince and sent messengers to the mountain, asking Prince Sudana to come back to the palace right away.

Sudana and Mandi packed their belongings and headed back to the kingdom of Yapa. The king came out of the town to meet them. The people cheered when they saw that the prince and his wife were back. The birds and animals gathered excitedly around to welcome their arrival home. It seemed that the entire city was now celebrating the family reunion.

125

Covering Up the Sun and Building Pagodas

Cave 454, Song Dynasty, 960-1279

In ancient India, before he became Buddha, King Asoka was very imperious and despotic to his people. Although he had 84,000 concubines, unfortunately, he had no children. A diviner invited a beautiful lady one day and was told that she would bear him a brilliant prince.

King Asoka was very happy and married this golden-haired beautiful girl and established her as his second wife.

The golden-haired wife was deeply loved by the king. However, the queen and other concubines had been very much jealous of her and tried to get rid of her all the time.

Several months passed, the golden-haired wife became pregnant. When she was about to bear, Asoka led the troops out of the country to fight against the enemies. The jealous queen thought that opportunity had come. She told the golden-haired lady, "According to the regulations of the palace, when you give birth, you must cover yourself, so that you won't be exposed." The naive golden-haired lady didn't know it was a trap and did so. After some pains she gave birth to a lovely baby that lit the palace room brightly. The bad queen stole the prince and killed him, and then she put a prepared pig beside the golden-haired lady. At the moment, the covered golden-haired lady asked, "Can I look at my baby?"

"Now you can, but just look at what you have given birth to!" the queen said coldly.

On seeing the pig, the golden-haired lady fainted.

"Aha, didn't you say that you would have a prince for the king, but why is it a pig? This is a monster! Take it out of the palace as soon as possible." the queen shouted. And she also drove the lady out of the palace and demoted her

to a concubine, then encaged her in the back garden.

Asoka returned to the palace. When he heard that the golden-haired lady gave birth to a pig, he was so angry that he didn't want to see her any longer.

Then, the golden-haired lady was suspicious about the matter, and she inquired the truth from the midwife and handmaiden who showed mercy on her and secretly found witnesses who had seen the queen's trickery.

One day, Asoka saw the golden-haired lady clearing the flowers in the colorful garden with unchanged beautiful look. He was moved and recalled the love before, then forgave her and welcomed her back. The lady was deeply loved again, thus she told the whole story to Asoka. Because of the witness and the material evidence, the queen and other concubines admitted everything. Asoka was extremely angry and gave orders to sentence them to death right away.

There's a dignitary called Yasa who lived in Sound-garden Temple. He was shocked by the matter. He sent a Bhiksuni to persuade the king, "Your Majesty, it's the queen and several concubines who hurt the prince. If you executed all of them, you will be sinful. After your death, you'll be in hell and suffer many kinds of pains."

"After hearing your enlightenment, I'm so regretful. And please tell me, how to be condonable?"

"As long as you consent to build pagodas for each dead concubine, and bury relics, then you will be relieved," the Bhiksuni said.

The king did what he suggested. He asked the Bhiksunis to search for the relics from the Ganges and gave them out to the ghosts and gods, and ordered them to build 84,000 pagodas at the same time on the same day in the country. This puzzled them, "There are so many large mountains and deep climbs. How will we see each other?"

"Well," the king said, "first you each prepare your locations, and five days later, when it's at noon, I will ask the powerful arhat to cover the sun and then you can start to build, alright?"

Five days later, the moment they saw the sun was covered up, the ghosts and gods everywhere began their work. In a day, they completed 84,000 pagodas. Later on, they were called Asoka Pagodas.

Translated by Lian Jinping

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Releasing the Fish with 100 Heads from Purgatory

Cave 454, Song Dynasty, 960-1279

Once upon a time, there was a country called Vridji in ancient India. The fields of the country were very fertile and the crops were abundant. The weather of the country was brisk but the people there were nice and friendly. Most of them believed in other religions and only a few believed in Buddhism.

There was a large river in the south of the country called Liyue. Five hundred fishermen often sailed their boats and fished on the river. One day, after casting their fishing net they found that no one could draw it back. So all the 500 fishermen came together and used all their strength to pull the net out of the water. It turned out that there was a big fish in the net. But the fish looked very strange.

Unlike other fish that only had one head, it had 100 heads! And the heads were all different. Some heads were like donkeys', some were like horses and some were like sheep, dogs, and pig heads. The news quickly passed round and people all came to the bank of the river to have a look at the strange fish. The fishermen had a discussion and agreed that it must be an evil fish. If they didn't kill it quickly, it would bring them disaster. So they went back to their homes and fetched knives to kill the 100-headed fish.

At that time, Buddha Sakyamuni was preaching at a temple. He opened his magic eyes and saw that the 100-headed fish at the bank of Liyue River was in trouble. Because there were only a few people in that country who believed in Buddhism, Buddha wanted to take this opportunity to show them the power of Buddhism and change their mind. He therefore quickly went to the bank of Liyue River with Ananda and the other disciples. At the same time, the fisher-

men were waving their knives to kill the fish.

Then Buddha shouted loudly to the fishermen,"Don't kill him! Please don't kill the fish!"

"Why? What can we do with an evil fish?" the fishermen asked.

"There must be some reasons for it to have 100 heads. Don't you want to know the story of it?"

"Yes, of course. But who are you? Why do you do this?" the fishermen asked Buddha.

"He is the Buddha who cultivated and led an ascetic life for six years," Ananda explained.

"We heard that your magic is endless and powerful. Now that you are the Buddha, why don't you tell us the story of the fish?"

"Let the fish tell its story."

Buddha Sakyamuni then started chanting sutras of Buddhism and performed his magic, which made the 100-headed fish recollect the things he did in his previous life and the fish began speaking man's language and therefore communicated with the people. After a while of intimate communication, Buddha asked him,

"100-headed fish, what did you do in your previous life that made you change into an ugly fish and was nearly killed by these fishermen?"

The fish then opened his mouth and said,"Well, it's really true that virtue is its own reward, and wickedness does not go altogether unrequited. In my previous life I was Brahman Kapittha. I was very wealthy and had a luxurious life. I was very proud that I was born into a noble family and often insulted the poor people and did many other vicious things. Thinking that I was well-read and very knowledgeable, I turned up my nose to Buddhism. Being provoked by evil people, I even hated the Buddhists. I often cursed them with catty remarks and I told them they were inferior to pigs, horses, cows and donkeys, and that their hearts were like that of the tigers, wolves, snakes and scorpions.

Because of those vicious things I did, after I died I became a 100-headed fish. But when I was middleaged, my parents often persuaded me to believe in Buddhism and to do good things for other people. Therefore, I did something good and prayed to Buddha by myself and listened to the preaching of Buddha

in person. After I heard the instructions of Buddha, I turned over a new leaf and stopped doing vicious things. That's why at this critical time, Buddha came here to save me."

Then Buddha Sakyamuni took the chance to instruct the people around.

"Now you've all heard the story of 100-headed fish. As long as you do good things to other people, you could be rewarded in your next life."

Later he preached to the 100-headed fish, and pointed out the bright broad way to release himself from Purgatory. Hearing the preaching, the 100-headed fish, after his death, became one of the gods in the heaven. In order to reward Buddha, he came back to the bank of river and offered sacrifices to Buddha with sweet flowers in his hand.

Buddha also preached to the 500 fishermen and explained to them the sutras of Buddhism. The fishermen all understood the words of Buddha and decided to believe in Buddhism and prayed to Buddha with all their heart. They also decided to stop killing, so they cut the fishing net and burned all of their fishing boats. Then they donned monk robes and became Buddhists. After cultivating themselves for a long time under the instruction of Buddha, in the end, they all became arhats.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

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The Stele of Asoka

Cave 454, Song Dynasty, 960-1279

Long ago, there was a cruel king who lived in Jambudvipa, whose name was Asoka. In order to keep his throne and force the country under his control, he killed many of his loyal and honest officials and replaced them with deceitful villains. For that reason, many officials in the court were afraid to give suggestions to King Asoka. He tyrannized over his people and imposed heavy taxes on them. If anyone dared to protest against him openly, the king would kill them all. Complaints could be heard everywhere in the country and more people were brutally repressed. More people began to revolt against him. Knowing this, the king became ever more worried and restless all the time.

One morning, King Asoka decided to change his past action and said to his officials, "I imposed strict laws and rules to govern our country and killed all the rebels for the peace and prosperity of our country. But why do we have more rebels and still no peace? You're my assistants and officials and receive your money from the country. You should give me some good advice and help me to release my burden and keep our country in peace!"

The officials all remained silent and no one dared to say anything. They were afraid that if they said something wrong, they would be killed by the king. After a long silence, King Asoka became irritated and snapped at the officials, "If no one gives me a good idea, you should all stay here and no one will be allowed to go home."

The astute prime minister was the king's most trusted and closest official. He showed a complacent smile when he saw that no one dared to speak. It seemed that if he didn't speak, no one dared to speak first. Then he stood up and said, "Your Majesty, the people who broke out in revolt should be punished fiercely. But we can't kill them without reason. Moreover, we have so many

people in our country. We can't kill all the rebels. In my opinion, we should build a prison and find some fierce and cruel man to guard it. This way, no matter who commits a crime, he will be thrown into the prison and be killed there. Thus, you don't have to interrogate the criminals yourself and sacrifice your prestige among our people. Through this method our country will be at peace forever. Please think about it."

On hearing this, King Asoka became very happy and thought it was a good idea. Then he asked the prime minister to build the prison.

After receiving the imperial edict, the prime minister organized people and supervised the building of the prison himself. It only took ten days to build a big prison in a hidden location. The wall of the prison was very high and thick and the watch tower on the wall rose high into the sky. The instruments of torture had various styles and the prison was like hell.

In the village of Gijjha-kuta, there was a family who made a living by weaving baskets. The old couple was very honest and frank. They only had one son whose name was Qi Lizi. He was very strong but also rather ugly. He was born with a fierce heart and often rampaged about in the village, but no one dared to fight with him. He treated his parents badly and often abused them or even beat them. There was no one in the village that wasn't afraid of him.

As King Asoka was building the prison, he sent his messengers to different places around the country to find a ferocious man to be in charge of the prison. One day, when a messenger came to Gijjha-kuta, the people there all recommended Qi Lizi. Then the messenger went to Qi Lizi's home and asked him,"Our king built a prison and he needs a warden who not only is just and fair, but also is heartless and cruel. Do you want to take this job?"

"Certainly! That's wonderful! I'm the best candidate for the job!" Qi Lizi was very happy and said. "I have no hobbies except killing. If our king names me as the warden, I will be very conscientious and torture every one who is put into the prison."

On hearing this, the messenger was very happy. He had found the right person the king was looking for. The king was very satisfied to have him as his warden of the prison. So he told Qi Lizi, "If you want to do this job, just follow me back to see the king."

"No problem. But wait for me a second. Let me say goodbye to my parents."

His parents heard that their son was leaving to take charge of the prison. They all persuaded him from going and said, "My son, you've already had such a bad reputation in our village. Even the little kids dare not cry when they hear your name. Now, if you go there to control the prison, you will kill many innocent people. Buddha said virtue is its own reward, and wickedness does not go altogether unrequited. If you did that, you would not be spared. You should stop doing bad things and learn the good virtues. You should not go there and take the job!"

Qi Lizi was irritated by the words and he said, "Stop bugging me! I've promised them to take the job. Just let me go! From now on, you just take care of yourselves."

Seeing that their son insisted on leaving, the father grabbed his sleeve and the mother held his legs to stop him. At that time, the messenger came in to urge him to set off. Qi Lizi was very angry when he saw that his parents were still holding his clothes. So he pulled out his broad sword and struck it at the old couple. Instantly, two heads fell on the ground. Their own son killed the poor old couple! The messenger was so astonished at what happened in front of him that he ran out of the house quickly shaking. Qi Lizi collected his stuff and the two went on their way to see the king. The messenger said, "Now I believe you are heartless and cruel, since you have killed your own parents. It's really rare in the world."

Qi Lizi was very proud of himself and said, "He who is not cruel is not a real man. I just want to show you that I'm a man that is just and fair and I can do the job very well."

When they arrived in the royal city, the messenger reported to the king the stories of Qi Lizi, including the story of killing his parents and his vicious behavior in his village. King Asoka was very happy and immediately named him as the general warden. And he also imposed an imperial order which stated: Whoever is sent to this prison will be killed. No one should be released from the prison. If someone disobeyed the order, Qi Lizi should be responsible for that.

At first, for several years, all the criminals who were put into this prison were tortured and killed by Qi Lizi. As time went by, Qi Lizi ordered his men to walk around the prison, catch anyone who passed by and kill them without any reason. King Asoka spoke highly of Qi Lizi's hard work and sense of responsibility.

One day, a little monk who came to beg alms and passed by the prison and was caught by the jailors. He was afraid when he saw that dark and horrific prison and the blood everywhere.

"Warden, we caught a little monk."

"Throw him into the boiling oil pot and kill him now!" Qi Lizi ordered in a ferocious tone.

On hearing that, the little monk knew that he had been caught and thrown into the well-known prison of Qi Lizi by mistake. He knew that it boded ill rather than well. So he begged him,

"I came to be a monk only for a short time and I haven't attained the level of disinterested wisdom and compassion. Please give me some time and let me read sutras to Buddha before you dispose of me."

"Alright, I'll give you one hour to read the sutras. But no matter what sutras you read, I'm afraid you can't escape from this prison."

The little monk then knelt down and put his hands together to chant sutras. At that time, the jailors caught another man. They cut off his hands and feet and took out his eyes and poured boiling water into his mouth. The man cried loudly and painfully, but the ogre Qi Lizi, burst into a sudden laughter. He stood up and threw the man into the smelting furnace by himself. The little monk was very sad at the scene and hurried to chant sutras to release the soul of the man.

Then Qi Lizi came by and sneered at him, "Little monk, now it's your turn!"

Two jailors ran at him at once like wolves. They raised the little monk and threw him into the boiling oil pot. But because the little monk chanted sutras with all his heart, he attained enlightenment. The boiling oil couldn't hurt him at all. And it seemed he was like bathing in a hot spring. He smiled and waved his hands to the jailors and Qi Lizi.

The jailors and Qi Lizi had never seen anything like this before. Then

they sent someone to report to King Asoka. King Asoka was very surprised, and decided to go to the prison and see the sight by himself. When he entered the prison, Qi Lizi stood in front of him combatively and ordered his jailors to hogtie the king.

King Asoka was puzzled and asked him, "Qi Lizi, how daring you are! Why do you treat me this way?"

Qi Lizi glared at the king and said sarcastically, "Don't dissimulate! I'm going to kill you!"

King Asoka shook his head and said, "I really don't know why you're doing this to me. Please tell me!"

Qi Lizi said with a shake of his head, "Your Majesty, if you really don't know the reason, let me tell you. As you know, you have imposed the imperial order and named me as the General Warden. And whoever entered this prison should be killed. But in the imperial order, it doesn't say that Your Majesty was an exception. Therefore, I will strictly follow the order and never change it. Now you've chosen to enter the boiling oil pot or knife hill." He gave the king a poisonous look.

King Asoka thought, "It's my fault for having named this scoundrel as the warden and fallen into such a dangerous situation. But he shouldn't kill me. Let me delay him on and find the way to escape."

Thereupon the king said to Qi Lizi, "OK, since I have imposed the order, there's no reason to change it. Please untie the rope and I will choose the way of torture by myself.

Qi Lizi thought he couldn't escape anyway. So he told the jailors to untie the king. Looking at the boiling oil pot, the hill with sharp knives and all kinds of instruments of torture with blood on them, King Asoka was very sad. He thought, "Since Qi Lizi has come to be in charge of the prison, he has been very heartless and cruel. Now he wants to kill me! He is the disaster of the nation! I should find some way to remove him."

Suddenly, a good idea came to mind. The king said to Qi Lizi, "I'm very happy to see that you are just and fair in you job. But before I choose the way of torture, can you help me to solve my doubt?"

"What do you want to say? Just tell me!" Qi Lizi said insolently.

"After the prison was built, who came here first, Warden. You or me?"

"I'm the warden. Of course, it was me who came here first."

"In my order, did I say that the wardens and jailors were an exception?"

"No, you didn't say that."

"Then catch Qi Lizi and tie him up!" King Asoka ordered the jailors. The jailors dared not to disobey the king's order and caught Qi Lizi and tied him up.

Then the little monk approached King Asoka and said, "Your Majesty, Qi Lizi did many bad things under your order and even wanted to kill you. Buddha once said life is like a sea of trouble: A man should repent early and be saved. Put down your butcher's knife and become a Buddhist as soon as possible. If you could learn this lesson and change your mistakes, if you give up the strict and cruel laws and rules and use your good morality to rule the country, I'm sure you could get the support of your people. Only in this way can you keep your country peaceful."

On hearing the little monk's honest words, King Asoka regretted what he had done in the past. He ordered the jailors to kill Qi Lizi immediately and tear down the prison. At the site of the prison, he set up a tall stele, on which he engraved the stories of tearing down the prison and giving up the old cruel policies and application of the new laws and rules.

From then on, King Asoka was loved and esteemed by his people. Crime ceased altogether and no one rebelled against his rule. All the people in the country led happy lives and many other small countries united with the king's.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

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The Derivation of Amitabha

South Wall, Cave 471, Early Tang Dynasty, 618-704

Amitabha is the hierarch of the Western Pure Land. He received and took the Buddhists to the Western Pure Land, so he is called "Receiving Buddha." And he is also called "Honorable Buddha" among the people.

Amitabha means incalculability, so he is called "Infinite Longevity Buddha" and "Infinitely Bright Buddha", meaning he is infinitely bright and has an infinite life.

Using paintings to explain and describe sutras is called "Sutras Conversion," that is paintings depicting the Buddhist sutras. The depiction of Sutras of Amitabha, Sutras of Infinite Longevity and Infinite Longevity Observation at Mogao Grottoes are generally called "Conversion of Western Pure Land" and there are 215 of them. In Buddhist sutras, heaven, where the Infinite Longevity Buddha lives, is called "Pure Land" and every Buddha has his own story. Here is the story of Amitabha.

Long ago, there was a country called Sandilya and the king of the country was Wu Zhengnian. He also controlled the entire world.

The Buddha who was living at that time was Ratnagarbha. The manner of the Buddha was solemn and his talents were incomparable. He also had endless power and magic, but he showed his qualities of kindness and humanity at all times. With his disciples, the Buddha preached and carried forward Buddhism among the people in Sandilya.

The king of Sandilya, Wu Zhengnian, was very merciful and open-minded. He had 500 princesses and 1,000 sons. They all believed in Buddhism and respected Tathagata. Influenced by Buddhism, the country was very prosperous and peaceful and the people led a happy life.

One day, Ratnagarbha took his disciples to the suburb of the capital city,

Anzhouluo, to turn the dharma wheel and preach to the people.

King Wu Zhengnian heard the news and was very happy. He took his officials, princesses and princes to the Jambudvipa Park and knelt down to pray to Ratnagarbha and walked around him clockwise and then sat aside to listen to the preaching of Tathagata.

A mysterious light emanated from Ratnagarbha as he explained the basic principles of Buddhism with all kinds of parables for the king and his followers to hear. After the preaching, the king was very happy, so he built a Seven-Gem Monastery at Jambudvipa Park for Ratnagarbha to teach sutras. He advocated to all his people to dedicate their treasures to the Buddha and the monks.

Buddha accepted the support and obligations and asked the people to worship Buddha Namo Amita and stimulate their superb mind for Bodhi. From then on, Jambudvipa Park became the center of Buddhism and everyday thousands of people visited the Buddha and the monks.

King Wu Zhengnian believed in Buddhism deeply and took turns with his princes to take care of Wealth God Tathagata, worshiped him at Jambudvipa Park, and sent him numerous treasures and jewelries. But because the king and his princes didn't understand the basic principles of Buddhism, the objective they were seeking was rather narrow and shallow. When they gave their alms, they all had different wishes. The king wanted to be the king again in his next

life. The princes had various wishes: some wanted to be Trayastrimsha Heavenly King; some wanted to be the king of the great Brahaman-heaven; some wanted to be the Demogorgon of Paranirmitava; some wanted to be the Cakravarti-raja; some wanted to be very wealthy while some wanted to lead a quiet life and study the law of Buddhism. However, no one prayed for the progeny position of vision to become a Buddha! The doctrines of Mahayana were not shown by them.

The king had a trusted official named Bao Hai who was the father of Ratnagarbha. Bao Hai also believed in Buddhism deeply and he often read and recited the sutras of Buddhism with Tathagata. While pondering the interpretation of the words in the sutras, he finally received the doctrines of Mahayana as well as magic powers. In order to make all the people of the country to believe in the Three Treasures, namely the Buddha, the Law and the Monk, and follow the doctrines of Mahayana, he left his palace and walked round all over the villages and towns to preach Buddhism. He asked the people to open their mind of Bodhi and look for the holy way to the heaven.

One night, Bao Hai had a dream in which he saw countless Buddha whose number was as many as the number of the pebbles in the Ganges. These Buddhas were sitting on lotus pedestal and holding beautiful lotuses in their hands. Their faces were serious and each lotus had a sundisk around and every sundisk let out six billion mysterious and marvelous lights. Bao Hai stood under the lights and bathed in their radiance. His body was clean, pure and like a mirror.

Then the lights disappeared suddenly and Bao Hai saw King Wu Zhengnian become something like a man with a pig face who wore bloodstained clothes and opened his mouth widely while running around to catch bugs to eat. After he finished his meal, he would sit under a tree and then numerous big bugs came to eat him. Finally he was eaten by the big bugs.

Bao Hai also saw the 1,000 princes of the king in his dream. Some had faces of a pig; some had a face of an elephant; some had a face of a water buffalo, a lion, a wolf, a fox or a monkey. The princes were also wearing blood stained clothes, running around to eat each other. In the end, only their bones were left, just like the king.

After Bao Hai woke up from his dream, he couldn't get asleep again. He was pondering over his dream, but until dawn he was still doubtful as to what he had seen in the dream. So early in the morning, he hurried to the Jambudvipa Park and told Buddha what he had seen in his dream and asked him to explain the dream for him. At that time, the king and his princes also came to the park and listened to Buddha's preaching.

Ratnagarbha already knew that the king and the princes worshiped Buddha for their own reasons only. He took the chance of explaining the dream to instruct the doctrines of Buddhism to them,

"It's nice that you dreamed of the lights and those Buddhas giving their lotuses to you in the infinite broad heaven. This is to show you that you will become one of them and it is because you have devoted yourself entirely in persuading people to open their holy mind of Bodhi. It's the sign that you have attained disinterested wisdom and compassion."

"Buddha, why did I see that our king and the princes were all changed into monsters that had animal faces?"

"This represented the people who don't understand the doctrines of Buddhism and only fight for the interests of themselves. Therefore, they will have endless troubles. However, they are still very proud of themselves, but they don't know they will have a miserable ending and suffering."

"Buddha, where are they going to go, then?"

"If they were born in the world of Evil, they would suffer the pain of rebirth. If they are reborn in the world again, they will suffer the pain of being born, illness, death, being old, love, departing, hatred and desires that can't be satisfied. If they are reborn in the world of hungry ghosts, they will suffer the pain of starvation. If they are reborn in the world of animals, they will suffer the endless dark and cutting of their heads. If they are reborn in hell, they will suffer the fiercest pain. Life is like a sea of trouble: man should repent early and be saved. Our Buddha believed that you had a merciful heart and a grand will. In order to change their miserable future, Buddha sent you to patiently persuade them to open their holy mind of Bodhi with the doctrines you have and change their future to achieve the superb Buddhist fruit."

The king, the princes and others in the audience heard this and they all

worried very much. They didn't know what to do, so they left the Buddha silently and went back to their homes.

The next day, Bao Hai came to the palace of the king and persuaded him according to what Ratnagarbha had taught him.

Bao Hai said to the king, "Your Majesty, birth and death make us suffer the pain of reincarnation without end. Only the heart of Bodhi can make us leave the suffering of the world behind. The fact that you worshiped Buddha and gave alms has proved that you had got the root of mercy. From now on, you should practice to open your superb heart of Bodhi, because the way of Bodhi is the way of infinite mercy and it's the way to be away from disturbing of ghosts and trouble. It's the way to the purest wonderful land."

After Bao Hai's earnest and kind remonstration, the king was awakened and said, "Bao Hai, hearing your words and your remonstration, I have decided to open my superb heart of Bodhi and never forsake it. I will follow the way of Bodhi in the future and study the laws of Mahayana and enter the incredible gate of Buddhism and to preach to my people and help to provide services for Buddhists."

King Wu Zhengnian was thus set on the right way of cultivating himself according to the doctrines of Buddhism. Every day he would sit in his palace to cultivate quietly and kept it for seven years. In those seven years, he gave up all his desires and didn't lie down in his bed. He devoted himself to the pondering of the doctrines of Buddhism and stopped all his trifles and experienced the doctrine of vacancy and proved the illusion of existence. In the end, because of his cultivation and his achievement in his life, he completed his benevolence.

Ratnagarbha thought the king had completed his benevolence and it was time to change him into a Buddha after he had an overall view of his cultivation and devotion to Buddhism. They chose an auspicious day and gathered all the princes and other believers of Buddhism and held a grand ceremony at the Jambudvipa Park for King Wu Zhengnian.

At the ceremony, after King Wu Zhengnian announced his great aspirations, he was honored by Ratnagarbha as a Buddha. His Buddhist name was "Infinite Longevity Buddha," meaning infinite life, or "Amitabha."

The princes and the monks all called out to him "Buddha Namo Amita!"

loudly.

Numerous flowers fell from the sky and the light of mercy shone down on the earth. Marvelous music played and the earth shook. Every life on earth felt joy, and all the people in every country were in a cheerful mood. They all came to celebrate the grand ceremony.

After that, Bao Hai also persuaded the 1,000 princes of the king to cultivate themselves for seven years and open their superb heart of Bodhi. He then announced their great aspirations and desire to become Bodhisattvas. He then held a ceremony and honored them with their titles: The first prince Bu Xun was Bodhisattva Guanyin, the second prince Nirmamacron was Mahasthamaprapta, the third prince Wang Zhong was Bodhisattva Manjusri, and the eighth prince Min Tu was Bodhisattva Samantabhadra.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

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Island of Treasures

South Wall, Cave 472, Mid-Tang Dynasty, 781-847

In ancient times, the Central Plains of China was a barren, mountainous region. The annual cycle alternated between drought and flood that destroyed the crops and left the people poverty-stricken.

One day, an elder Buddhist monk arrived in the area. He radiated good health and vitality and had vast knowledge of things and places that the people had never heard of. Taking pity on the lean and haggard people in their tattered rags, he decided to help them out of their misery and ignorance. And so he told them about an island in the sea far away; an island where there was gold and silver, jade and other valuables, piled up like mountains of jewels.

"Courageous people follow me," he said confidently, "I will be your guide and I promise you that, when we get the treasure back here, you will have a life of comfort and plenty."

The people knew nothing of this fabulous island but they were soon in a fevered pitch of excitement to go and claim its treasures. So the monk chose several of the strongest young men to make the long journey to the Island of Treasures.

Before the young men began their preparations, the elder monk gathered them together and addressed them.

"The journey upon which you embark," he said emphatically, "will be long and arduous. You must cross vast grasslands and dense, dark forests. There will be mountain peaks to scale and wide rivers and deserts to traverse."

Everyone gasped in astonishment and then groaned with disappointment. One young man stepped forward and expressed what the others were thinking.

"Surely you joke! The island is as far away as that? Why, by the time we got there we would be nothing but bags of bones! Count me out," he said angrily.

"Don't be discouraged," the elder monk said, trying to encourage them.

"Be dertermined and strong and I promise that you will all return safe and unharmed with the treasure."

A heated discussion ensued among the young men.

"Let's go," cried some.

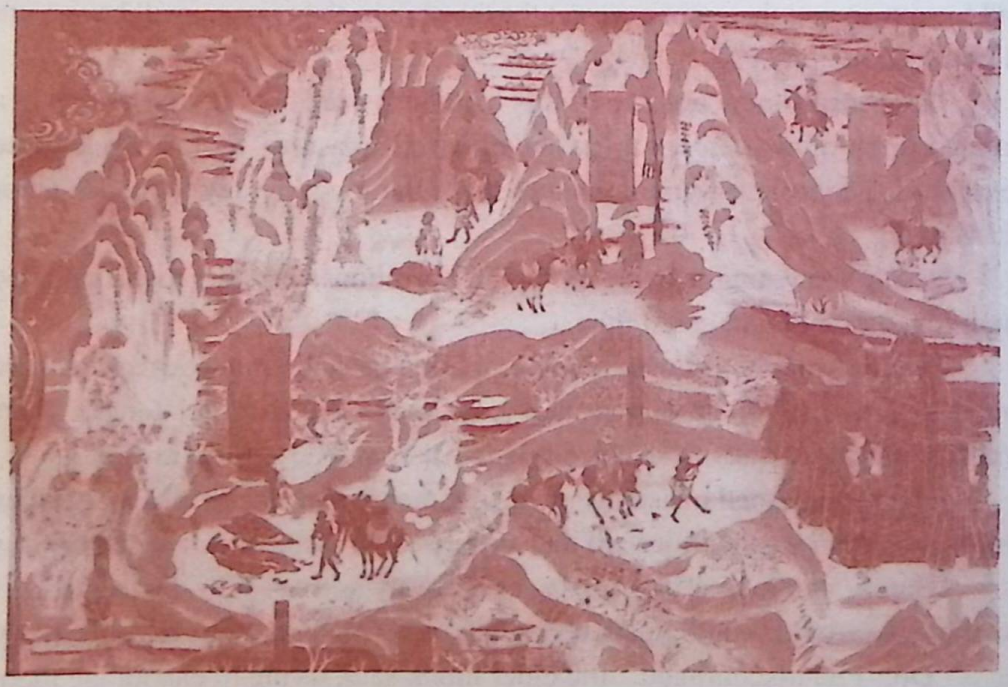
"No," argued others, "it's too dangerous."

"We could go half-way and if it's too difficult, we can turn back," offered another.

"We would be fools to place our lives in such jeopardy," observed another.

And so the argument raged back and forth as everyone voiced their opinions and objections.

At last, a withered old man stepped up before the young men. "Listen to me," he said quietly, "What would you rather do, stay here and starve to death in this desolate place or take the chance for a better life? We should trust the elder monk for I believe that he can lead you to the Island of Treasures and bring you back safely. We who remain behind give you our support and will ensure that your families are looked after while you are away. Please," he en-



treated the young men, "Just go."

The bells on their horses and camels jingled merrily as they traveled along the Silk Road. Before too long, the bleak Central Plains was behind them and a beautiful landscape opened up before them. Waterfalls cascaded from steep mountain peaks. They saw majestic forests and vast expanses of sweet grasslands. Covered in a profusion of flowers, the distant hills shimmered like pink clouds. Trees were heavy with ripe, succulent fruit.

For several days, the young men walked on, so entranced by the beauty around them that they were oblivious to how far they had journeyed.

They reached the dense forest and entered its dank depths. As they walked within the embrace of the ancient pines and cypresses, the men heard wolves howling and tigers growling. It was humid and difficult to breathe under the canopy of trees, but they forged on courageously, ignoring their cuts and bruises. They emerged from the forest finally, only to be faced with a high, precipitous mountain range.

Undaunted, they clambered along the winding trails, up one side and down the other side. Mountain after mountain they strained their aching muscles struggling across swift rivers. They ate in the wind and slept in the dew. Hardship were made bearable by their singular goal: to reach the Island of Treasures.

After more than a month of grueling travel, the men were exhausted and haggard, their bodies battered and bruised from their exertions, and their spirits at low ebb.

"Where is the island?"said one man wearily. "Look at us, my brothers. We are sorely injured and some of us suffer from sunstroke. We can't go on like this."

"Look," cried one of the men, pointing ahead, "A desert! We can't possibly get across without water!"

"We can't go ahead because we have no water," despaired another man. "And we can't go back because we have no food."

Without hope and unable to withstand more hardship, the men sank into a state of gloom. One young man tore at his gear and flung it away then fell to the ground weeping. Another man knelt, facing the desert, and prayed to Buddha to deliver them.

"We all know that when bitterness ends, sweetness begins," said the elder monk, trying to comfort and encourage them. "I warned you of the difficulties that you would face on your odyssey. But an unflinching will is the hope of success," he counseled gently, "It would be a great pity to give up now, when the Island of Treasures is so near."

"But that is a desert, not the sea," protested one man.

"Look again," the elder monk said softly.

The men peered into the desert, straining their eyes to see what the elder was talking about.

"There is something out there," exclaimed one of them, "It's a castle, a magnificent castle."

"Yes," said the monk, whose powerful magic had produced the castle. "Inside that castle we will be provided with plenty of food, we can rest and recover for a few days before starting out again. Within seven days of travel to the castle we will come to the sea and you will behold the Island of Treasures."

The travelers' spirits soared at the sight of the castle and its promise of succor. It was an ancient fairy palace set in a glorious and splendid landscape. As the travelers entered its gates, they were greeted by wide avenues and throngs of happy, smiling people. Pretty maidens played celestial music in the palace gardens. For seven days the travelers rested and reveled in the comforts and pleasures offered there.

On the eighth day, the elder monk gathered the men together and announced it was time to leave the castle and continue their trek. But they were all reluctant to leave.

"Why should we go on?" they cried. "Aren't we looking for paradise, for treasure, for a happy life? And haven't we found all of that right here? Why should we bother to search further?"

"Foolish men," said the monk sternly. "There is no happiness in this life without hard work," he admonished.

With that, he waved his arms three times, whipping up the winds and just as magically as it had appeared, the castle instantly disappeared.

The young men were astonished and looked at the monk with wide eyes. This was not an ordinary monk before them!

Smiling at them gently, the old monk said, "We have had a much needed rest and we have recovered from our hardships. It is time to travel on."

After seven days, they arrived at the seashore. There, just as the elder monk had promised, was the Island of Treasures. The young men clambered aboard a boat and rowed towards it. Everywhere they looked they saw piles of gold and silver, diamonds and jewels. They filled every sack and bag, bottle and box with as much as they could carry and, loaded with their treasure, the travelers started for home.

But the elder monk had suddenly disappeared. All the travelers knelt in gratitude to him and swore to become disciples of Buddha. For it was the Buddha who had saved them and their families from an impoverished life by showing them the way to the Island of Treasures.

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Xuan Zang's Pilgrimage for Buddhist Scriptures

Yu Lin Grottoes

The story of the *Journey to the West* is well known in China. The main characters of the story—Xuan Zang, the Monkey King, Pig of Eight Precepts, Friar Sand and White Dragon Horse are very popular among the Chinese people. In fact, in the early stories of the *Journey to the West*, there was only Xuan Zang. The Monkey King and the Pig of Eight Precepts, and Friar Sand were not yet in the story. Xuan Zang was commonly called Monk Tripitaka or the Monk from the Tang Dynasty. His original family name was Chen and his given name was Wei. He was born in Yan Shi, Henan Province. When he was 13, he followed his older brother and became a monk. They studied Buddhist sutras at the Jingtu Temple of Luoyang. Later he went to Chengdu to continue with his study of Buddhism. When he was in his 20s he went to Chang'an and started to preach Buddhism. He became very popular among the people in the ancient capital of China and people called him "The Swift Horse of Buddhist Sutras."

During his study of Buddhist sutras, Xuan Zang often encountered some problems. He discovered there were still many unclear phrases in the Buddhist sutras. Some of them were not translated correctly. So he swore to go to the origin of Buddhism—Ancient India in the west to find the answers and to return with explanations for the Buddhists. During the Tang Dynasty, people were forbidden to travel to other countries. So Xuan Zang wrote a letter to the court and applied to go to the west for Buddhist scriptures. He was refused by the court but Xuan Zang still insisted on going in spite of the forbiddance.

After Xuan Zang made preparations, he told people that he would travel around to preach and he set off on his pilgrimage. He passed the Yellow River and came to Liangzhou (Wuwei, Gansu Province). He saw that there were many

temples there and Buddhism was prevalent among the people. The monks of the temples invited him to preach for the Buddhists. He soon became popular among the Buddhists there because his explanations of Buddhist sutras were clear and easy to understand.

When Xuan Zang was planning to set off to the west again, the local government received an order to stop him. The governor, Li Daliang, came to Xuan Zang and told him that he could not go to the west and forced him to go back to Chang'an.

But since Xuan Zang had pledged to go to the west for Buddhist scriptures, he didn't want to return. So he lied, saying he was not going west and he would stay in Liangzhou to continue with his preaching. One dark night, when the guards watching him were asleep, he escaped and continued on his pilgrimage.

Because all the governments around Hexi Corridor had received the court's order, Xuan Zang dared not enter the cities and towns again. So he slept in the daytime and set off during the nights. On this way, the soldiers did not catch him. He passed Zhangye, Jiuquan and arrived in Guazhou (now Anxi County). One day, when he was begging alms, unfortunately, the patrolling soldiers caught him and he was sent to the state governor.

He was questioned by the governor, Dugu Da. During the questioning, in order to slip through, Xuan Zang didn't tell the governor his real name. But the governor recognized him and knew he was the monk that had been wanted by the court. So he fulminated, "How dare you, little monk, cheat me here! Pull

him down and beat him 50 times by the bamboo plank."

Xuan Zang saw that he couldn't cheat the governor and he would be beaten by the bamboo plank, so he told the governor his real name.

On hearing his real name, the governor hurriedly walked to Xuan Zang to untie him and apologized, "Sorry, we didn't know you were the well-known monk. Please forgive us for what we have done to you!"

Xuan Zang was puzzled by the sudden change of the governor's attitude. So he put his hands together and said, "No, I don't deserve it. I don't deserve it."

"We have heard your name for a long time and we are really lucky that we could meet you here today. Please come with me to the parlor and let's have a talk."

When Xuan Zang went to the parlor, Dugu Da prepared vegetable dishes and treated him warmly. It turned out that the governor sincerely believed in Buddhism so he invited Xuan Zang to preach for him and his family.

The abbot of the temple at Guazhou also invited Xuan Zang to teach Buddhist sutras. The marvelous memory and eloquence of Xuan Zang moved all his audience at the temple as he made the sutras vivid and very interesting as well. Among the audience, there was a foreign monk whose name was Shi Pantuo. He was born with big nose and eyes, a sharp chin, a large beard and a lot of facial hair. After hearing the preaching, he admired Xuan Zang very much and asked him to be his disciple, and to follow him to the west for Buddhist scriptures. Xuan Zang knew that he was very familiar with Western Regions. He accepted him as his disciple and half a month later they set off to the west in spite of the detainment of Gu Duda and the monks.

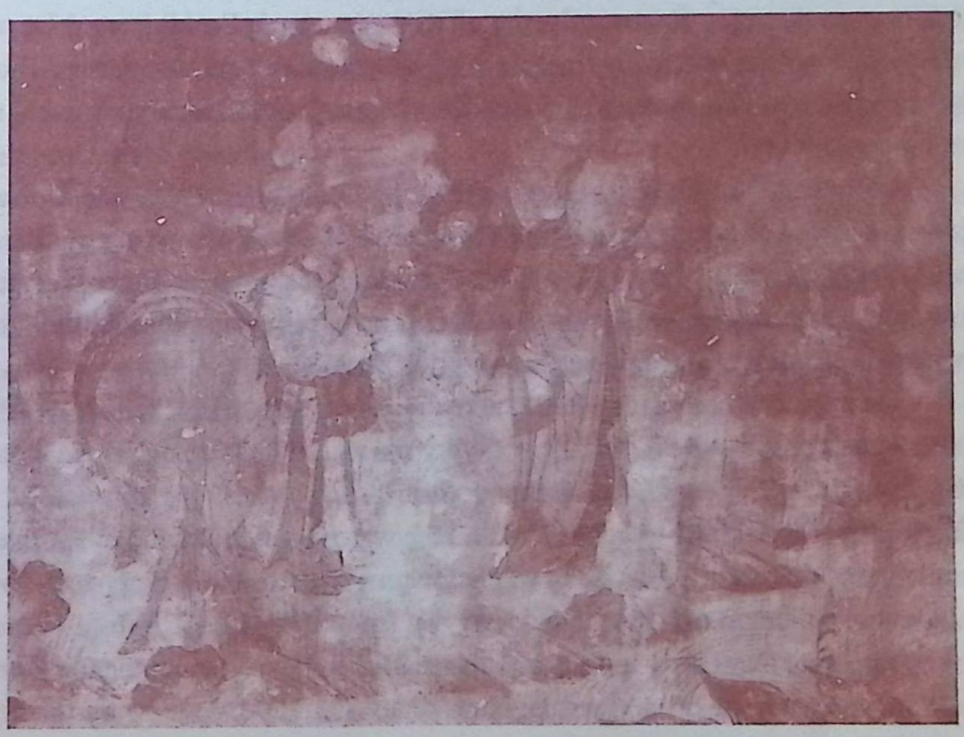
They walked a day and came to a farm. The owner of the farm, whose family name was Hu, also believed in Buddhism and he did business on the Silk Road. When he heard that Xuan Zang wanted to go to ancient India for Buddhist scriptures, he also began to persuade him not to take the adventures and go back to Chang'an, because there would be endless dangers on the way to India.

But Xuan Zang was resolute with his decision to go west. Hu knew that he couldn't change his mind, so he sent him a horse that was very familiar with the way to Qomul. The horse was pure, white and had experienced many suf-

ferings and it became the White Dragon Horse in the novel. Xuan Zang set off again with Shi Pantuo and the white horse that carried their luggage.

In order to avoid the obstruction of the officials and soldiers, Xuan Zang and his new disciple, Shi Pantuo rested in the daytime and walked on their way during the night. One day they arrived at the Gourd River, but some soldiers guarded the bridge and the torrent in the water rushed through. It was too wide to cross without a bridge. Shi Pantuo took out his sharp ax and cut down some white poplars and put them across the river. He also put some branches, weeds and earth on the poplars, so that Xuan Zang and the white horse could walk across the river.

Yumenguan Pass was located at Dunhuang during the Han Dynasty (206BC-AD220), but in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), it had been moved to the Double Towers around Anxi. Because Xuan Zang had no carnet issued by the government, Shi Pantuo led him walk around Yumenguan Pass and continued west.



There were five beacon towers and sentries on their way from Yumenguan Pass to Qomul and the soldiers guarded them day and night. If the soldiers caught them and they couldn't show them a carnet, they would be punished and sentenced according to law. As they walked on, they entered the wild stone desert where there was not even a blade of grass. Shi Pantuo began to worry because he was afraid that they could be caught by the soldiers or that they would die of thirst. He didn't want to go on with Xuan Zang and persuaded him to turn back to Anxi or Xi'an because there were still countless difficulties if they went west. But Xuan Zang was extremely determined and he was not frightened by the words of Shi Pantuo. So he let Shi Pantuo go back to Anxi and he set off again on his way to the west with the white horse.

When he passed the first beacon tower, the water he carried with him was gone. When he reached the second beacon tower and went to the creek to carry water, he was seen by the soldiers and nearly shot by the arrows they let off. The soldiers caught him and sent him to the official who was in charge of the beacon tower. Xuan Zang told him his name and his pilgrimage for Buddhist scriptures to the west. Fortunately, the official was also a Buddhist and he respected Xuan Zang and his invincible will. He prepared some water and food for Xuan Zang and wrote a letter to tell the officials at other beacon towers to let him go through.

With the letter, Xuan Zang smoothly passed the other three beacon towers and entered the stone desert east of Qomul. The stone desert was endless and nothing grew on it, and there were no birds in the sky and no animals on the ground. It was summer and the sun was like a fire burning the ground. Even the wind was so hot that it rolled up the sand into the sky.

On his way, Xuan Zang often saw the bones of man. When he reached the furthest part of the stone desert, he was very thirsty, so he took down the water bag from the white horse and wanted to drink some water. Unfortunately, it dropped on the ground by accident and all the water poured out and evaporated under the burning sun. Xuan Zang wanted to turn back to fetch some water, but suddenly he thought of what he had swore in front of Buddha, "Before I reach the destination, I will never turn back to the east." So he overcame the thirst and continued west. After five days, he hadn't had a single drop of water and he fainted beside a sand hill. Then the white horse nipped him and kicked him and

woke him up. The white horse saw that Xuan Zang was weak, and he crouched down. Xuan Zang knew he was in terrible danger and used his last strength to climb on the horse. The white horse had traveled that way many times so he knew where they could find water and rushed toward it quickly. It was not far away from the oasis of Qomul. It only took the horse half a day to reach the oasis and Xuan Zang survived after he had some water.

Xuan Zang went on and passed the Mountain of Flames and reached the Royal City of Gaochang (Now Gaochang Ancient City east to the Turpan Basin). The king of Gaochang was a Buddhist and the whole country believed in Buddhism. They had heard the name of Xuan Zang for a long time and they welcomed him hospitably. They also wanted to keep Xuan Zang in their country to preach instead of going to the west. In order to show his resolution, Xuan Zang fasted for four days and finally the king of Gaochang gave up and sent Xuan Zang gold, money, and cloth, and 30 horses and 25 followers. But later when they climbed the snow mountain, two thirds of the people died.

After many sufferings and dangers, Xuan Zang arrived at the center of Buddhism—ancient India. He visited all the historical remains of Buddhism and traveled to over 30 counties in ancient India. Then he studied and researched at Nalanda Temple, which was the highest center of Buddhism and finally he became a wise Buddhist.

Xuan Zang left China through the middle way of the Silk Road and returned to the Yangguan Pass in the south western area. It took him 17 years and he traveled over 50,000 miles. From India, he took back 657 Buddhist scriptures and wrote a world famous book of history and geography—*Traveling to the Western Land of Tang Dynasty*. He was a great traveler, translator and Buddhist master of the Tang Dynasty.

Translated by Xu Zhijun

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Mr. Li first traveled to the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes in 1976 and has since revisited these sacred places numerous times. Over the past 10 years, working in collaboration with Canadian anthropologist Dr. Naomi McPherson, Mr. Li has also completed translations of the following books: *Tales from Dunhuang* and *Frescoes and Fables—Mural Stories from the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang*.

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